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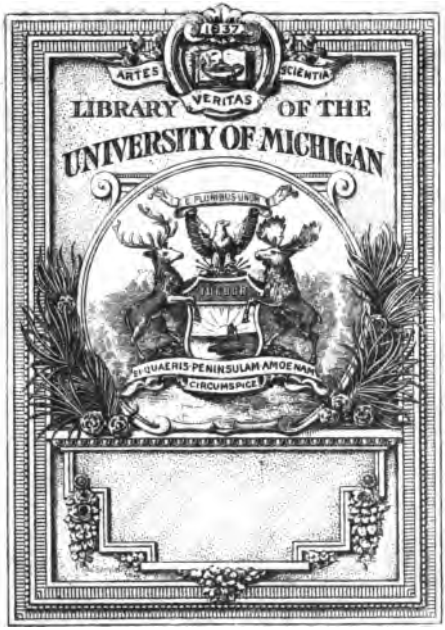

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MICKY

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MICKY

BY

OLIN L. LYMAN

AUTHOR OF

THE TRAIL OF THE GRAND SEIGNEUR

BOSTON

RICHARD G. BADGER PUBLISHER

The Gorham Press

1905

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TO THE GRIND

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THE ROLLING STONE

With winds of the jolly old earth, heighho!
Blown like a moth—with a gay hello,
Gay hello and a gay good-by
For the spell of the present is quick to die—
Quick to die, and the future fair
Lures hither and yon and everywhere;
So here's to Life and its years that fly
With a gay hello and a gay good-by.

Never a dream so bright, so vain
As the turreted castles I build in Spain;—
Never a city so far away
As glows on the rim of my desert gray;
But hither and yon, with restless feet,
To the end of things and the winding sheet;
Hither and yon, while the grim years fly,
With a gay hello and a gay good-by.

O. L. L.

Syracuse, N. Y., August, 1905.

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MICKY

CHAPTER I

A STAR CHAMBER SESSION

THE speaker paused for a moment to pass his handkerchief over his fevered brow. Up from the ugly, leering, little eyes swept the swabbing linen, traversing the smooth top of the round head and disappearing mysteriously at the rear. The reason for this was obvious. The teeth of time take kindly to the hirsute and the speaker was very bald. Only a narrow fringe of reddish hair divided the rear depression of his fevered brow from the nape of his fat red neck.

A plump and hairy fist smote the table and the glasses jingled. "Don't fool yourselves, you young fellows," advised the bald gentleman, in a curious gusty voice. "I've been all through it, clean to the retired list," with a wicked wink, "and I know, that's all. You've got to work harder this year than you did the first; you've got to a point where there ain't no layin' down for you if you want to keep on fodderin'. 'Cause why? 'Cause they're on, or think they are, and they're gettin' uneasy. You think everything's lovely, do you? Well, take a little advice from the old man that's now on the sideline, and aim to get busy from now on."

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He again swabbed his illimitable brow, peering cunningly at them with wicked little eyes that gleamed unpleasantly on either side of a bulbous, crimsoned nose, while he chewed complacently at a black cigar. In common with the rest of the small company he was in his shirt-sleeves, for it was very hot. A mere ghost of a breeze stole in through the window screen, against which foiled moths, attracted by the light within, bumped in vain. A white-aproned waiter, summoned by an electric bell, entered, removed the empty glasses and received a fresh order. With his departure the bald gentleman was again heard from.

"Well," he snorted aggressively, "what's eatin' you? Don't you believe me?"

"Why," drawled a lank, middle-aged gentleman with a generally unsophisticated look that increased the efficiency of his talents for the peculiar use to which he devoted them; "I suppose it's safe to be on the safe side, but there's no use in borrowin' trouble any more than you have to. Everything looks smooth to me."

"Pals," remarked the bald gentleman impressively, "remember this. The only way to stave off the foreclosure is to keep borrowin', and it's the smoothest whisky that gives you the rockiest head the next morning. 'Cause why? 'Cause you get enthused and hit it up too hard. Now that's where our danger flag's out. We've found this an easy town, we've worked it for all it's worth, puttin' it in plain English; the reformers ain't never woke up and you're takin' the attitude that they never will. Boys, it's a mistake. They do, sometimes. You don't want to plan on no sleepy campaign, if you'll

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take it from a sideliner that's 'retired' but wishes you well."

"That's all very well, Alderman," said a plump, moon-faced fellow across the table, "but we've had these scares before and they've been for nothing. Two years ago Fusion thought it had us beat and we was afraid it was going to turn the trick. Remember the vote? Why, we got the laugh from our own men. We needn't have hustled ourselves. It was a dead open-and-shut."

"It's because the town don't believe half it hears," interpolated the lank gentleman. "I'll say this, that the old man—drink to him, boys!—is the best organizer in this country today, and he leaves the blindest trail. They can't bring anything home, not while we're in control."

"That's what I'm tellin' you," remarked the bald one grimly. "You've got to hang on to the control. Let it slip away from you while you're nappin' and how long would it be before the town was next? What would the hide of any man in this room be worth?" His voice had instinctively lowered; his head was thrust forward, his little eyes were piercing. "I tell you it always pays to keep busy all the time."

There was a moment's silence. The half dozen companions of the speaker surveyed him minutely but with visible respect. After all, he could give any and all of them pointers in the gentle art of grafting and they knew it. Moreover, his words had at last struck home, had awakened them from a false sense of security. Alderman Goldberg had been through the mill, and had fed at the public crib at intervals no bettter judged than times when he elected to remain in discreet retirement, in his cyclone cellar, until ominous signs on the municipal weather

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horizon had disappeared. So, because they knew that he spoke by the card, his companions now paid him the tribute of uneasy silence.

The lanky individual, Dick Peterson by name, finally resumed the conversation. "Well," said he, "this is only a preliminary to the main event anyway. Wonder what's keepin' the old man? Here we've been waitin' an hour. We'll see what he says. I haven't mentioned 'campaign' to him myself."

"I know what he'll say," retorted Goldberg. "Just what I've been tellin' you, to get busy. That's why he called you here tonight, to dig in the spurs a little. The old man's no fool. Hark! I guess he's comin' now."

There was a soft tread outside, a door opened and a man entered the room. Nodding slightly in response to their greeting, he seated himself in a chair, at the head of the table, which had evidently been reserved for him. Peterson pushed some cigars toward him, at the same time thrusting an interrogative finger toward the electric bell. The newcomer shook his head, and selecting one of the cigars, leaned back in his chair as he leisurely lighted it.

John Shaughnessy was as unlike the cartooned type of political boss as could be imagined. He looked decidedly ordinary, and might have been taken for anything from a dejected clerk of middle age to an unostentatious gambler. His garb was quiet; there was an utter absence of vociferous jewelry. In person he was lank and slightly over middle height. The face was singularly impassive; that of a gambler to whom nothing apparently mattered. A hawk nose and small black moustache had Shaughnessy, also a pair of heavy-lidded eyes.

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These eyes, when they glanced casually at you, held a lustreless, ennuied expression that impressed you, did you trouble to entertain any impression at all, with a definite idea of somnolence in Shaughnessy. A discouraged gambler, you might think casually, had you not the honor of his acquaintance. But did you happen to kindle Shaughnessy's interest in any way, lo! a startling change. The heavy lids contracted ever so little about the black eyes, which shot forth gleams that revealed Shaughnessy in a new and sinister light. They bared a sleepless vigilance, an unpleasant concentration, which inspired the person regarded with a nervousness that was justified. For when those eyes, but a moment before lustreless and dead, lightened with that strange gleam, the dispirited clerk or discouraged gambler vanished. In his stead, regarding you with a cold, basilisk, snaky stare that pierced you through and through, there was revealed—Shaughnessy.

It was his wonted mask of impassive features and lustreless eyes that long caused Shaughnessy to be surprisingly and generally underestimated. Men chose not to believe that one whose general appearance so lacked significance was capable of the stealth and finesse in large, dark matters that a portion of the press emphatically but rather gropingly attributed to Shaughnessy. So it was Shaughnessy's good fortune, for his nefarious ends, that most men refused to take him too seriously. The majority chanced never to rouse his interest; hence, never saw the optical gleam. For the minority who did, Shaughnessy was a man transformed, invested with power, genuine and unmistakable.

Following the leader's entrance, the company waited silently for him to speak. He favored them with a mo-

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ment's reflective stare, puffing billowing smoke clouds. Then he spoke, and his voice was as cold and impersonal as his white face.

"I called you together, boys," said he, "because there's work ahead for us." There was a significant nod from Goldberg. "It doesn't look bad at a first glance," continued Shaughnessy, "but a look-in will show you that it will pay to hump some. There's nothing open yet, but we've got to face the hottest fight we have had. Well," with a grim smile, "we'll do it and we'll win out. We've got to."

"Yes," remarked Peterson, with a deep sigh. "We've got to, all right, governor."

"That's what I was tellin' 'em, Shaughnessy," put in Goldberg, rolling his cigar to the lee corner of his mouth. "They wanted to give me the laugh. Thought everything was lovely. They'll know when they've sidestepped the shivers as often as we have. I tell you, the clearest day is the one you want to have your umbrella ready for, and that's no lie."

"No," assented Shaughnessy, "that's no lie. It's going to rain votes this fall and we've got to get busy in mortgaging the majority of 'em. If we don't, we get caught napping, that's all, and it's us to the woods. I needn't tell you, of course, that as late as a year ago we could have defied 'em to put the hooks on us, even if they'd got a look-in at the polls. We had things tied up so they couldn't have touched us; we could have stayed right on. But there've been some bad mistakes made; some instructions exceeded and some things we couldn't help, being forced into 'em. Truth is, boys, that if through any chance we're done up in this coming election, we're

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caught right out in the open with a wagonload of goods, and there's no time to hide 'em. That's the situation we're facing and it's one that calls for cutting out sleep till after election day."

"Well, we've done it before," remarked Willie Shute, the moon-faced gentleman, as he pressed the button for another round of drinks. "What the devil is sleep, anyway? Waste of time."

"It's a waste of time in politics," assented the leader, "unless you want to wake up to find you've been buried alive with no air tube." Willie Shute, following the laughter which greeted this grisly pleasantry, was discovered looking about him with vague apprehension.

"Thought I heard someone snickerin'," he explained. "Before we did."

Peterson glanced significantly at Shute's whisky glass. "Preliminary to the main event," he commented. "Saw off, or you'll be hearing bands of music in the morning."

Shaughnessy leaned forward upon the table. "Well, let's get down to business," he remarked. "Let's talk things over, look at all we've got to buck against and plan to buck it in the good old way. Give us another whack at this and in the next two years we'll be ready to retire with a trail blinder than an eyeless fish in the Mammoth Cave. But it would be all day with us to lose just now; we can't afford it. In some ways we're better fixed for the fight than we've been before. We own one newspaper body and soul, though we're not advertising it. We've practically clinched another of 'em, there's a couple that don't count anyway, and then, there's that damned Courier."

"What figure does it cut?" sneered Goldberg. "What

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do you care? You've got good organs of your own."

"I'd give the lot of 'em, pro and con," responded Shaughnessy reflectively, "if I could either switch that sheet onto my line or work it for a neutral sidetrack. It's got more real, solid influence than the lot of 'em put together. It's always been against me, more or less, said I was 'some' back in the days when the other papers gave it the laugh. Last election it let up a little. I was beginning to get in. Then old Westlake bought up the controlling interest unexpectedly a while ago, and they're getting ready to lam it to us this fall, boys, and don't you forget it. We can't do anything with Westlake. You know I was trying, through sources that ought to have been influential, to get in an entering wedge by practically throwing the whole batch of city printing at Westlake's head. Well, what do you think? Westlake was on all right and it's a case of no compromise. Matter went to the business office and was referred directly to him, as a matter of course. He sent back word that the Courier was planning to print a great deal about the city "gov." during the next few months that it wouldn't charge anything for."

"Well," inquired Goldberg, after a moment's silence, "what good is that going to do him?"

"Nothing yet," replied Shaughnessy, the light of battle kindling in his strange eyes. "He's got nothing that'll do us any real harm, and I think we can see to it that there'll be no leaking on anything that will. It's up to us just to pull down the blinds, and keep 'em pulled, and then let Westlake howl about what he suspects; he won't know anything. We've got respectable papers," with an ugly sneer, "controlled by respectable men on our side,

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too. If Westlake or any man of Westlake's can dig up anything after we've nailed it down, why, he's welcome to it. But now let's get busy and talk things over."

A colloquy followed which would have electrified the citizens of this community, could they have heard it. Ancient, mysterious skeletons were exhumed in that talk, skeletons which had been in the flesh the source of much speculation. There were recent dark issues, too, and there was a murky present and a future that would be murkier, did things go well. All told, an opportunity to listen to that conversation would have benefited the adherents of municipal decency.

After two hours of reminiscence, of planning for the campaign and speculating on the future, Shaughnessy rose with a yawn. "Get a good night's sleep, boys," he suggested dryly, "and then don't sleep again till the day after we do the old ladies at the polls." They laughed as they followed him out of the private room and down stairs.

There was a slight stir in a corner of the room. It subsided as a waiter entered to clear and tidy the table. With the receding steps of the servitor down the stairs, from behind the sideboard in the corner softly stepped a man. He looked cautiously about him, then, stepping to the window, he quietly withdrew the screen, and, gaining a convenient roof outside, replaced the screen carefully. Upon the roof his stealthily receding footsteps were audible.

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CHAPTER II

AN ARRIVAL

"AMBITION is an itch for something you haven't got and never expect to get," remarked Peters, rapping his pipe bowl against the edge of the desk and reaching for Mead's tobacco box. He owned none of his own and the rest of the force formed a convenient and interminable tobacco trust for him.

"You might add to that observation the clause 'but others have,' Pete," put in Charlie Kirk, while Mead resignedly watched Peters jamming an unwieldy wad of the weed into the bowl with his thumb, to brazenly reach for more the next instant. "Besides, that remark isn't original. It's gone the rounds of the papers. I don't know where they pinched it, but I'll bet it wasn't from you."

"Your observation does you credit, Sherlock," retorted Peters, undisturbed. "If you would exercise a little of that faculty on the job, maybe the old man would raise your attenuated wage."

The quiet voice of the city editor broke in upon the amiable colloquy. "Here, Kirk," said he, "and you, Peters, I want you. Go and relieve Smallwood and Lynn at that visiting convention and tell them to hurry here with their stuff. They've been there since seven. I thought the thing would be over by now."

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Kirk and Peters left Mead's desk, where they had been loafing for a few spare moments, and, slipping on their coats, walked to the elevator and sank streetward. The city editor delved again into the debris on his groaning desk. It was a rush night. The few men in the great room, for most of the reporters were still out, were bent over portly pads or pecked busily at typewriters.

Mead scrawled away at the lecture story to which he had been assigned that evening. Warming to his work he rounded out many of the professor's periods for him and added some good things of his own. Now and then he read a paragraph with complacency and sifted in a few more adjectives. He had heard the old fairy tale of speakers giving reporters credit for improving their efforts. Moreover, he was but lately hatched from the high school and was nearing the end of his probationary period upon the Courier. As with the *debut* of most of the boys, coherence was smothered in verbiage. Mead's written words flowed on like rivers to the sea. You who speak by the card will well remember the turbid freshets you handed in, long ago, with a sort of awe to think you had penned them. You looked for a little corresponding awe on the part of the city editor. He merely grunted, and the next morning it was a wise father that knew his brain-child. The anxious parent looked twice through the pages, finally finding the changeling, dwarfed and subdued, in a modest corner next the patent medicine "ads." Stripped of the gauzy gewgaws of fancy with which you had complacently adorned it, it lay in its stark cerements of staring simplicity, a hard, terse, graphic, uncompromising fact. That salient bar, the editorial pencil, had dammed the winding, sunlit

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stream at its very source, forcing it home by a short cut that skipped much romantic scenery but saved time for the navigator. You read the mangled remnant of that early flight and cursed the city editor's lack of literary appreciation. Afterward, when the years had brought you wisdom, you wondered why he had kept you at all. Yet you knew, after all,—for the veterans were tyros once.

Mead toiled on, the mirage of an achieved literary gem on his mental horizon. It was the same mirage, old yet ever young, that flashes in transient glory and fades as often and as miserably before the wistful eyes of the veteran in letters as with the tyro; the dream of an unattainable ideal, which mocks and melts away, a phantom of the sands.

His task completed, Mead brought his masterpiece to the city editor's desk. "The lecture, Mr. Harkins," said he, with a thrill of secret pride. A sense of polished erudition welled strong within him. Harkins might now see what the real thing in literary skill could do with the most prosaic of assignments.

Harkins had cleared his desk pretty well in the past few minutes and his assistants were busy in consequence. He slapped the masterpiece irreverently on the desk. Like a withering blast his trained eyes swept the first page, which was heavily laden with elaborate introduction. There were a few fierce swoops of a blue pencil. Words fell in the ranks like scattered skirmishers, then platoons of phrases were swept away. The enfiladed page fell face down on the desk. Another, similarly mangled, followed. Only a few gallant remnants of that imposing array remained. It was the survival of the fittest, the obliteration

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of the superfluous; but it was hard. Mead watched the sacrifice in slow, gathering horror.

Harkins looked up. "Busy night!" said he abruptly but not unkindly. "Anyway, this won't do. Cultivate the newspaper style. Get brevity, terseness. Cut out excess baggage. Get the right word and fit it in right. You're voluminous. Make it luminous."

Harkins resumed the massacre and Mead, poor innocent, walked disconsolately to his desk to digest the bitter pill that must invariably be administered to the newspaper novice. At Mead's age the simultaneous discovery that there are things to learn and things to unlearn is disconcerting. He sat discouraged, his pinions drooping, and stared gloomily at some gyrating millers about the electric bulb over his desk. Presently he tried to catch them, with a half-acknowledged desire to pluck off their wings in a little game of "pass it on." But they were elusive and evaded him.

Several men came in from assignments, and removing their coats, for a hot wave was grilling the late days of June, set to work. Smallwood and Lynn, back from the convention, left thick wads of copy on the city editor's desk and went out for a late lunch. More reporters entered hurriedly and fell to. The dramatic editor entered with deliberation, as became the great, and leisurely set about the roasting of a "first night." Copy boys scurried like scampering ants. The editors bent to their tasks, the reporters' fingers rushed over the pads or jingled the typewriter keys. Everybody hit up the pace but the dramatic critic. He sat, pencil poised like a poniard, deliberating whether he should slay the piece and principals by slow torture, like an Indian, or perform the

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deed with one murderous lunge. The proprietors of this particular theatre had fallen out with the business office of the Courier. They did not advertise in the Courier now, so when the dramatic critic attended their house he paid for his seat and charged it to expense account. Naturally, what the Courier said about the attractions at that house, during the season in question, was not what it would have said had the brethren been dwelling together in amity.

This was a particularly auspicious occasion. The other houses had been closed for several weeks, owing to the advent of warm weather. This theatre had opened to accommodate a troupe which, in stage parlance, was trying it on the dog before venturing to launch a new summer attraction in the metropolis. After due reflection the Courier's dramatic critic savagely gripped his pencil and proceeded to use it as a bowie in the interest of the suffering dog.

There had been nothing more for Mead to do and he sat at his desk, sucking disconsolately at a short pipe. It being a new accomplishment, he found difficulty in keeping it lighted. He viewed the moths with malice, their fluttering wings fanning his resentment. He was again reaching cautiously for them when a voice sounded at his elbow; an odd voice, unlike other voices.

"Say, kid," it inquired, "where's the head push?"

Mead turned, somewhat confused by the unexpected interruption. "Huh?" he asked.

"Why, the main squeeze, the first fiddle!" was the impatient rejoinder. Then, as an afterthought, "the city editor."

Mead indicated. "Over there," he said. "His name's

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Harkins." He turned in his chair to watch the stranger, who shuffled over to Harkins' desk.

"Say, Mr. Harkins, I need a job. And that's no lie," was how he put it.

Harkins whirled in his chair. His keen glance swept the visitor from head to foot. "No, I guess it isn't," was his quiet verdict. "You need a lot of things, don't you?"

"You've hit it, sir," grinned the guest, "right behind the ear. But a job will bring 'em and my face won't. It's been overworked lately, that face, and I'm restin' it. I'd hock it, but it's all I've got, and besides I guess I've got all it'll bring already."

"Shouldn't wonder," grinned Harkins in reply, surveying with growing interest the traveller, for such his appearance bespoke him. "Did it bring you here?"

"No, they didn't see it," laughed the stranger. "I came by freight from Cleveland. It was a pork train—and I'm on it yet," with a sweeping gesture that indicated the ensemble of his frayed and dusty habiliments. "No low bridge for me that trip," he continued. "The brakemen rode on top, but the bumpers were good enough for me. Ain't so risky."

Harkins quizzically looked him over. He was uniquely worth the trouble. A battered cap, tipped rakishly over one ear, topped a mat of curly red hair of the peculiar bricky hue that hisses a sibilant Celtic brogue in whilom wind-stirrings. Beneath a broad forehead there danced and rioted two Irish eyes, pale blue pools in an environing forest of freckles. Nature had been generous with mouths when he transpired and had given him enough for two. He had further distended it with much smiling. His cheeks and chin were rough with a sandy stubble; not

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over-coarse, for he was young. He was slender and of medium height. His garments, in an advanced state of senility, exuded cinders at every pore. As for his shoes, the poor devil was literally on his uppers.

"I guess," said Harkins, not unkindly, "I guess, my boy, we're full."

"You're lucky," murmured the stranger, gray discouragement in his face. "Wish I was. I'm a hollow tube just now."

He turned suddenly toward Harkins, despair in the eyes grown dark with trouble, the light and the laughter fled.

"My God!" he gulped, "I haven't eaten a morsel for hours! I want to earn my livin'! I know I look like a hobo,—I am one, I suppose,—but I'm a workin' one. I'm a bum tramp reporter, it's true enough, you only have to look at me. But try me, Mr. Harkins, just give me a chance to make good, for I tell you I can get the news!"

Harkins involuntarily thrust his hand into his trousers pocket. A gesture restrained him.

"Mr. Harkins," said the visitor, with an odd dignity, grotesque enough in his shabby garb, "no hand-outs. When I can't earn what I eat, I'll cut the game."

Harkins reflectively looked him over, now with a little concern. Pride in such tatters, that would not accept alms, merited consideration. Then, too, Dodds had just been dismissed and someone must replace him. But the stranger! He was hardly an acceptable candidate. Still, there was a frankness in the mottled face and twinkling eyes, an odd note in the voice just tinged with an Anglicized brogue, that appealed to Harkins. In the en-

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suing moment of hesitancy the question was decided for him.

A telephone bell sounded at the city editor's elbow. He turned in his chair, clapped the receiver to his ear, listened a moment, replied briefly, hung up the receiver and turned to the stranger. Mead, the only one of the force at liberty, had leaned forward in his chair as the city editor answered the 'phone. Now he settled back again in deep disgust as Harkins addressed the disreputable visitor.

"I'll try you," he said briefly. "Know the town at all?"

"No, but I can find it," was the reply.

"There's a big row on at the corner of Elm and Market streets," said Harkins. "Beer and brickbats, tough locality. Rival nests of low foreigners. You'll have to step lively, forms close early tonight. By the way, take Mead with you and you take charge. It's a job if you win out. If not, you can travel."

The stranger grabbed his hat and vanished, the resentful cub at his heels. The city editor glanced at the big clock in the corner and returned to his task. More men came in, including Kirk and Peters, the convention having finally adjourned. The manuscripts multiplied on the readers' desks. On all sides men were laboring furiously.

Three-quarters of an hour had elapsed when there was an upward whisk of the elevator and into the big room hurried the seedy stranger. Mead, no longer resentful, followed him. Indeed, there was something of homage in Mead's tribute toward the other, the involuntary tribute that any honest tyro must pay, in any trade, to the ex-

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perienced hand who knows his business. Mead was perspiring. So was the stranger, who had evidently kept himself and his force moving. Straight to Mead's desk strode the new arrival, tearing off his shabby coat as he went, Mead heeling. The leader flung himself into Mead's chair, waving his hand toward the vacant desk next to it, where the cub meekly seated himself and fell to writing. He had been assigned to his part of the tale by the vagrant journalist as the two were rushed back to the office in a cab from the scene of the trouble.

The stranger drew from his vest pocket the stub of a soft-leaded pencil about three inches long. The point was inserted for a thoughtful instant in his mouth, then was slapped swiftly upon a pad. Sprawled forward, with elbows on the desk, he wrapped his calves securely around the legs of his chair. Thus he began the strewing of words upon the paper, in the execrable handwriting and at the phenomenal speed which have become traditions of that office, where each has remained unrivaled in the paper's annals. Oblivious of his surroundings, he bent over his desk like a jockey in the saddle, eyes glued on the pad whose leaves he was covering at lightning speed. As he proceeded he tossed the finished sheets carelessly aside without pausing. Mead, too, under the benign influence of time-pressure, took a long stride forward in newspaper requirements by forgetting to "pad" uselessly. Meanwhile the city editor's assistants gathered up the finished sheets and carried them away to be hastily edited and shot upward to the compositors.

It was, in reportorial parlance, "hot stuff." A man had been killed in this battle of the slums and the criminal was somewhere in hiding. Many men were injured,

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some seriously. Extra policemen had been summoned. The detail had charged the mob with sanguinary results, both to the mob and the bluecoats. As usual some non-combatants had suffered. There had been a number of arrests. The patrol wagons had been busy, the gongs of the hospital ambulances had sounded their warning as they dashed to the relief of the injured. It was the big story of that issue, grim and formidable, dwarfing even the stormy convention in its dramatic features, which partook of the sombre dignity of the tragic under the masterly treatment of the tattered scribe. It was, too, a chaotic story, with a certain swirl, a swift rush of events that had piled one upon the other with a cyclonic swiftness that must have staggered a neophyte and taxed to the utmost the highest resources of brain and nerve, together with the most feverish energy of the veteran.

In a full, rounded entirety, dwarfing the efforts of the rival morning dailies,—though some of them had several experienced men on the story,—the parish of the Courier read of the memorable riot in that issue. It was actually impressive to watch the story pouring from the point of that flying, disreputable pencil, flowing down the sheets in a mad torrent, the scenes brought before the reader's eyes with an irresistible force that made them visible in graphic word pictures, as if actually photographed. The stub rushed on, weaving the main web of the tale, while Mead's pencil picked up the loose ends in the form of minor details. Harkins marveled as he watched the story's development. Its size surpassed his expectations. Had he fully understood its scope, several of his best men would have been taken summarily from their tasks and sent post-haste to the scene. Not till this tattered knight

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of the road returned, with the cub in tow, had Harkins known of the snowball's growth. Yet here it was at last, the final sheet of what Harkins' trained journalistic sense told him was a superb handling of an unusually difficult assignment. He sent the last sheets upstairs and turned to the stranger and his faithful cub, who were mopping fevered faces.

"Great!" quoth Harkins, including the cub, who felt his oats in consequence and began filling his pipe with due seriousness. "You will do," added the editor, turning to the new man. "Come on tomorrow afternoon."

The new man rose to leave but hesitated, crimsoning a little. Harkins eyed him inquiringly. The stranger grinned rather ruefully.

"Object to my sleeping on this table?" he asked. "The rate is cheaper. Besides, I'm hollower even than I was."

Harkins laughed, but it was a sympathetic laugh. "I had forgotten," said he. "You'll find a bed softer than the table, I imagine, and there is a filling restaurant in the next block." He proceeded to make an advance on the new man's salary. The latter thanked him and was off.

The boys crowded around, curious and interested. "He's no Albert Edward on wardrobe," commented the dramatic critic, "but he's a pippin just the same. Who is he, Harkins?"

"Hang it!" replied Harkins dubiously, "I forgot to ask him. What's his name, Mead?"

"Gee, I don't know," replied the cub, sucking contentedly at his pipe. "He didn't give me any time to ask."

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CHAPTER III

MICKY

MICHAEL O'BYRN, picturesquely Irish, so his name appeared on the payroll, but from the cases to the press room they called him Micky. Mike would have been a misfit, for its tang suggests a burly, bull-necked son of Erin with fists like hams and a brogue of gravy-like thickness, a boisterous, beefy, big-hearted broth of a boy of blows and budge. Micky had the Irish heart, but he was short on fists and beef and possessed the mere ghost of a brogue. Besides, O'Byrn's pseudonym suggests juvenility, and Micky's four and twenty years, with their palpable vicissitudes, had not robbed him of that saving grace. Indeed, on meeting him, light-hearted and laughter-loving as he was in youth, your imagination would experience little effort in leaping a long leap into futurity to behold him a generation on, white-polled and with the olden freckles faded in his wrinkled face; still the laugh on his lips, the light of quizzical humor in his blue eyes. Glad he would always be, because there would always bubble in his heart the fountain of eternal youth.

The newspaper spirit had its embodiment in Micky O'Byrn, the tattered knight of the road whose first story electrified the city editor of the Courier. The spirit shone out of the portals of the twinkling Irish eyes, eternally

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questioning. It reconnoitred the field from the bridge of the nose that twitched with eagerness at the scent of a story, as a pointer snuffs grouse. Within the mouth, that was always distended with an ingratiating smile, dwelt in amity those heavenly twins, guile and blarney. They served as forceful means to the eternal end of news-seeking, and they were backed by ramparts of cheerful impudence that flanked the whole freckled face. The chin was round, but a bump peered forth that bespoke tenacity. He ordinarily displayed a guileless expression that hid an unfathomed depth of resource. Once on the trail, he could never be turned away. When one route to information failed, he had a dozen others in readiness, leading by devious paths to the desired end.

O'Byrn's appearance, when he had selected and donned his new ready-made suit, rakish derby and vociferating shirt, was decidedly tracky. This transformation occurred soon after he joined the Courier's staff. The suit was checked in a pattern which cried aloud to heaven, the new crimson tie adding its insistent clamor. The derby was done off in a delicate drab. As for shoes, he selected tan oxfords with red ties. The ensemble, to use a word that found much favor with Micky, "jibed" harmoniously with his thick fell of lurid hair and his staring freckles. In dress, as in all else, Micky was a pronounced radical.

Micky entered upon his service for the Courier with a vim which abundantly realized his promise to "make good" if given the chance. In him energy was wedded with tenacity. He had an inexhaustible fund of subtle resource, an ingratiating impudence. Altogether, he was well adapted to his strenuous trade, the trade that sifts out so much of chaff and leaves so little wheat—and

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finally withers the wheat till it follows the chaff. Micky had a positive genius for coping with obstacles. If he could not "sidestep" them he climbed over, crawled under or wriggled through them. Harkins steered him up against nearly everything in those first few days and he never fell down. Harkins began to grow self-complacent regarding his discernment. He had discovered this pearl, or to put it more literally, this speckled ruby of journalism. As a matter of fact, the ruby had discovered himself, but Harkins had helped. He was entitled to congratulate himself, for the new arrival was amply demonstrating his services to be valuable.

Micky had been with the Courier a fortnight. The voice of his new apparel had been heard on the land and also on the waters. For only the previous day he had boarded a tug steaming out to the quarantine station, casually absorbed a mine of information without the suicidal flashing of a notebook and scooped the field with a harrowing chapter of abuses by those in power. His prestige was increased. A little bird slyly twittered in his ear that they had started him low in the wage line. He would better strike for more while the iron was hot, for it was like to cool quickly in this uncertain calling.

He pondered over the matter, his feet reposing on his desk, a red-eyed cigar stub in the corner of his mouth. It was midnight. He had handed in a warm political column, happened upon by accident that evening. He was always stumbling upon such accidents, that spelled spice for the reader in the morning.

Micky ceased ruminating, with a mental vow to strike 'em next day. He rose, yawned, stretched himself and strolled over to the sporting editor's desk. O'Byrn sank

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into an adjoining chair as his neighbor administered the finishing touches to an intercollegiate field meet of that afternoon.

"How 're ye, Fatty?" inquired Micky amiably, prodding his co-laborer in the ample excuse for his nickname.

"Fine 'nd dandy, Irish," replied the rotund Stearns rather absently, as he pensively rubbed his prodded abdomen. "Say, Irish," he burst out in an odd breathless way—Fatty's fits were a joke in the office and startling to newcomers—"good hammer throw, that. Fell short two feet, though." He shoved a written sheet over to Micky.

Micky had jumped in his chair at the onslaught, spilling cigar ashes over his noisy shirt bosom. "Short of what?" he demanded with sarcasm, blowing the ashes into Stearns' rubicund face. "Fatty, have you got 'em again?"

"Got nothin'," retorted Fatty, rubbing an ashy eye. "They'll never beat it, never," he murmured, more to himself than to Micky, with a slow shake of his fat head. "Not on your pajamas! They can't touch him."

"Cut it out, Fatty," exhorted Micky with concern. "Quit the pill cookin' stunt or it 'll land you in the dip-house for sure. Why, you spit when you talk now! Of whom are you dreaming?"

Fatty came back to earth. "That's so, you weren't here then," he vouchsafed pityingly.

"When?" retorted Micky pugnaciously. "When wasn't I here?"

"Three years ago," replied Stearns, the tremolo of a tender memory throbbing in his tone.

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"And if I wasn't here," demanded Micky, unmollified, "who was, you sofa pillow?"

The sofa pillow, like most such, was good natured. He grinned forgivingly at the freckled features opposite him.

"Dick Glenwood was!" he answered with firm finality. "Yes 'r! And when he got through there was nothin' else. The rest of 'em were hangin' on the clothes line. It was three years ago, Speckles, and I was helpin' do the intercollegiate meet for the News. Cubbin' it then, you know. All the colleges, Hale, Pittston and the rest were there. I knew Dick; best man Hale ever had, bar none. Knew what was comin'. Came from the same town as I did. Brought up together; he's licked me more than once," with pardonable pride. "Came out just as I expected and he scooped everything. It was his last appearance, graduation year, big rep. Had to make good and he did, won everything in sight. That is, everything he went into, and he was in everything worth while. Made some records that stand today. And that hammer throw! Say," gurgled Fatty, his face apoplectic, "that man Myers came the closest to it today of any meet since then, and he's got two feet comin' to touch it!"

"Dick Glenwood," mused Dicky. "I've heard the name around the office."

"And why not?" exploded Stearns. His little eyes, lurking beneath folds of fat, peeled like round agate marbles. "Why, man, don't you know?"

"Know what?" snapped O'Byrn, reaching for a convenient paper-weight. "Now, Fatty!" poising the weapon.

"Know he works here, of course," replied Stearns, viewing the weight apprehensively. "Say, Irish, don't talk to me! You'd better come out of it yourself."

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"Works here?" repeated Micky, putting down the weight. "I haven't seen him."

"On his vacation," explained Fatty. "Expect him back tomorrow. My last whack at this stunt."

"So he does sports," observed Micky, taking a fresh cigar from Stearns' vest pocket. "I thought you did 'em right along."

"Me?" exploded Fatty, in incredulous oblivion of slaughtered grammar. His fat face expressed ludicrous amaze at the impression. "Why, man, he's the best sporting writer in town or anywhere else! I'm just supplyin'. Ordinarily I do odds and ends. I've done everything but time. Sometimes, when we're specially busy, I act as his assistant. He got me my job here when the News fired me."

Fatty was nothing if not ingenuous. Micky did not try to hide his grin, for it would make no difference with Fatty.

"Why, yes, I've read of that fellow," assented Micky, transferring a generous portion of the contents of Stearns' match box to his own pocket. "So he went into this rotten business, did he?"

"Why, yes, he's stuck on it," explained Fatty. "You see he's got money."

"Got money!" echoed Micky amazedly. "Gee whiz! then why—? Excuse me, Fatty, I'm asleep at the switch for fair."

"I don't know," floundered Fatty helplessly, "but anyway, his father's got money. But Dick likes this business just the same. Been at it since he left college."

"Then it is because he's got money, or his father has," agreed Micky. "I couldn't see it before, but you have

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made it very clear, Fatty. It's because he's got money or his father has. How stupid of me to be wingin' on that proposition! But if he didn't have money, or his father didn't, and he was doing this for a living like the rest of us instead of for the fun of it, he'd say to the devil with it, like the rest of us—and probably keep right at it, like the rest of us." In which words Micky gave utterance to a philosophic, universal truth.

The voice of the city editor broke in upon the conference. "Say, Stearns," it called, "where's that meet?"

"Most done, Mr. Harkins," responded Fatty in a panic, diving into his copy like a greased swimmer off the side of a yacht.

"O'Byrn," called Harkins. "Here's word of a row down at Goldberg's saloon on Ash street, pretty serious. Thuggery. Slide down and get it quietly. You know they don't like the looks of notebooks around there," with a grim laugh.

So Micky, whose memory was his notebook and a wonderfully accurate one when caution and cunning were demanded, hurried to the elevator.

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CHAPTER IV

FISTS AND THE MAN

BETWEEN Goldberg's and the polite in-dulgence there was a great gulf fixed. From the north side, with its glittering palaces of Bacchus dispensing varied decoctions served by irreproachable chemists, you travelled south through a scattered series of lessening liquid glories. Finally you came to Goldberg's, where they took it straight in draughts of cheap, blistering stuff which maddened and incited to crime. Goldberg's was the dive of last resort for the submerged tenth. Its maw gaped hungrily, gorging upon the dregs it gathered in. Finally, when the victims were stripped of their miserable resources, they were spewed forth, with brains inflamed with the liquid damnation purveyed there. Ripe for any crime, they were foul fruit for the gaoler and a menace to men.

Goldberg's existed by grace of the modern god of money. Goldberg was a tool of the autocratic Shaughnessy, who contrived to head and manage a corrupt city government. Goldberg captained his ward, which was one of Shaughnessy's gilt-edged assets. The ward had become Shaughnessy's by right of Goldberg's conquest. It was a ward of thugs and human jugs and brutal, elementary mugs; all American sovereigns, equalized with

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decency under the deathless document of American independence. Born sovereigns, or having taken out papers, the adult males in this ward had lined up one day, now far in the past. One hand of each proudly clutched a ballot, the badge of his sovereignty. The other hand was greedily extended for the accompanying cash. Into the grimy palms had dropped more cash from Shaughnessy via Goldberg, than could be afforded by any of their rivals. So the ballots poured into the boxes for Goldberg, whose bull-faced lieutenants flanked the line to see that the bargain was carried out. Goldberg was the choice of his people for alderman. He was theirs, and through his rude genius, under Shaughnessy, it transpired that they were his forever.

He did not sit with the council now. He had long since relinquished even the higher posts of confidence with which Shaughnessy had honored him after his aldermanic career. Truth to tell, Goldberg had become sufficiently notorious to convince Shaughnessy that it would be politic to remove him from under the direct glare of the public eye. He could perform better service from the wings. So Goldberg had apparently retired from all connection with the politics of the city and even his own ward, though Shaughnessy and the retired gentleman could have told better. They now picked their puppets to run, invariably routing the forces of law and order on election day with the tremendous majorities for license and disorder rolled up in their several wards. There was subsequent increment, which someone got, gathered in shady subways of a peculiar municipal government; presenting the situation which makes the indifferent voter a byword and reproach in many cities of

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this broad and extremely hospitable land. On these triumphal election nights, too, joy overflowed at Goldberg's place,—albeit he was "no longer interested in politics,"—and fell like strong dew upon the unjust. There were free draughts of the cheap in beverages flowing fast into the faces of the unlaved, unshaved crew. The godless exulted and Goldberg continued to hold them for Shaughnessy in the hollow of his hand.

As Micky was whirled southward, in an open trolley car, he reflected upon his dubious assignment. How should he conduct his campaign? It will be readily gathered that newspaper men were not especially popular at Goldberg's. Most of the representative city sheets, irrespective of political leanings, had for years been flaying the fifth ward king, seeking to uncrown him. Thus far it had been without avail. Not yet had the decent element been able to throw off the thrall. This was because they had been indulging in that practice which so universally blocks the wheels of progress in most lines, the pastime of quarreling among themselves in regard to the most desirable means to the end. So Shaughnessy and Goldberg, their colleagues and all they represented and misrepresented, were still in control, and buying larger burglar-proof safes. The newspapers had kept the quarreling factions of the perennially defeated party informed as to this growing prosperity, as well as they were able to ascertain regarding it. Naturally the gang's leaders and their mates resented this, for it favored the chances of the opposing party's factions finally getting together and putting the whole evil crew out of commission. When a man has begun to make easy money,

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he mourns to break off the habit; nor does he view with pleasure attempts to compel him to do so.

Micky hoped he could get his story quietly, for discovery of his errand in that unfriendly atmosphere would probably mean failure and perhaps a broken head. However, he hardly thought he would encounter anyone he knew there, so would trust to luck.

Alighting from the car at the end of South Avenue, he made his way through a tangle of dark, rank thoroughfares, which grew dingier and more disreputable as he continued, till he came to the street, little more than an alley, where Goldberg's flourished like a green bay tree, —late in season, for the structure needed painting. Low and dingy, squat and ugly, it crouched between a couple of cheap brick tenements like a stolid, sullen beast of prey; its few small windows alight with a dull red glow, like vengeful eyes. From within there came the discordant brawling of a cracked phonograph. A couple of red-eyed human derelicts, stupid with drink, lounged against the portal as Micky entered.

It was quiet enough now. There were no signs of a disturbance. Micky was chagrined. He had hoped to arrive before the trouble, whatever it had been, was over; if not in the thick of it, at least before the participants had dispersed. He could then follow some of the interested parties and secure the details, for he knew his game too well to have meditated seriously the idea of making any pointed inquiries in the dive itself. That would mean an instant awakening on the part of the questioned to the fact that a newspaper man was present. If he persisted, there might ensue rough treatment and a swift and painful exodus. However, he found it as quiet

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as the grave. It was apt to be so at Goldberg's after a rumpus. Micky shrewdly guessed that the end of the trouble had been the signal for a general discretionary scattering. There were present only the bartender and two men who stood against the bar, their backs to him. Micky noticed with relief that Goldberg was not present. It was as well, for Micky and he had met.

Micky walked slowly to the end of the big low-ceilinged room and seated himself at a small beer-splashed table. He chafed inwardly. What had happened? Had the police arrived and gone, if indeed they knew anything about it? Or, worse luck, had some man from a rival paper anticipated him?

These disturbing reflections came simultaneously with O'Byrn's seating himself. As he did so, a step sounded behind him and a form sank into a chair at his left, facing his own table.

Micky's heart bounded. Luck was with him after all. "How 're ye, Slade?" he sang out, with cordiality tempered with a sly wink. "I just got in from the Speedway track. Just enough left to save hitting the ties home." Micky's horsy clothes bore out the bluff.

Nick Slade was no fool. He caught the situation at a glance. Micky had rendered him a service only a week before, the little Irishman's blarney rescuing him from a prospective entanglement with the talons of a policeman. Slade was a shred of a fellow, with a lean dark face and black eyes that were as impersonal as a Chinaman's, as they gazed into Micky's warning blue ones.

"To the bad, eh?" he rejoined, with a dry grin in the direction of the men at the other end of the room, whom he was facing while Micky's back was toward

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them. "If you'd cut out layin' your own coin, and stick to business in tippin' off the guys who can afford to lose it, you'd be better off. I told you not to go up against that bum line of selling-platers."

"Well, I've got enough left to have a drink on it anyway," replied Micky, with reckless prodigality, rapping on the table for the bartender. "Lap up with me. Say what."

"Spivins water," answered Slade, his synonym for whisky. Micky ordered ale, for ordinarily he avoided the little red devil. When he did not, the little red devil played ducks and drakes with him and his prospects.

When the bartender had set down the glasses and gone, Micky said quietly, "Slade, you know why I'm here. Do you know that story?"

"Sure," said Slade, "but you don't want to ask for it here."

"I know it," acquiesced Micky, producing cigars. "That's the reason I just rang the bluff of a cheap sport. I know I'm one anyway, but I don't want 'em to tumble to the fact that I write when I'm not sportin'."

"Sure not," agreed Slade. "If they did, Irish, someone would get hurt, and it wouldn't be the sidewalk. Mulligan, the bartender, is soitinly a baby bouncer."

"Well now, Nick," said Micky, "I want that story, and I want it right. It's gettin' early. Now you do a heart-to-heart Uncle Tom and Little Eva talk with me about the races, and by and by I'll go away. You're not in it, you know; I flash no paper and mum's the word. I just keep it in my nut, understand? Now spill it out."

So Nick spilled it out and Micky absorbed his facts,

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sans comment; mentally registering the full details of a story that proved interesting the next day, well besprinkled with gore and full of the zest which made life worth living in the realm that was Goldberg's. Micky gave a subdued grunt of satisfaction as it was finished, his restored complacency being heightened by Nick's assurance that so far he was the sole reporter on the scene. Harkins' tip must have been a private one. Micky gloated over the prospective beat.

He had it all now, and time was forging pressward. He shoved what cigars he had with him toward Nick, with an eloquent look of gratitude, and rose, moving nonchalantly toward the door, Slade following.

All had been well, but one of the imbibing pair fronting the bar chanced to turn, eyeing Micky squarely. He was a gent of agility. With a couple of bounds he sentineled the doorway, barring the intended exodus. Wrathful fire gleamed in his bleared eyes; the stubble of his crimsoned face seemed not unlike the rising hackles of an enraged dog.

"Speedway track, eh?" he roared. "Busted sport, eh? You little baboon, youse will be busted afore youse gets out o' here, an' dat ain't no lie neither! Mulligan, d'ye know who dis is?"

"Naw!" replied Mulligan, the laconic, thrusting out an angled chin and screwing his vicious little eyes into gimlet points. "Who t' 'ell?"

"He's dat new Irish Courier pup!" bellowed the obstacle, "de speckled sneak wot done my game for me last week. I told youse about it."

"Youse did, Cullinan," admitted the bartender and deliberately rolled up his shirt sleeves. Cullinan's com-

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panion, too, had slouched up and scowlingly flanked his irate pard at guard. Mulligan thoughtfully emerged from behind the bar. In the sinister situation, the forcible tribute that Cullinan had just paid O'Byrn upon his professional ability failed wholly to arouse a gentle glow of satisfaction in Micky's disturbed breast. The recognition between him and Cullinan, general blackleg, had been mutual.

There was an instant's silence. Mulligan broke it with salvos of scientific and finished profanity.

"Yer here for a story," he concluded, "a hot one. An' ye've got it. But how de 'ell—" with puzzled head scratchings. His venomous little eyes fell upon the instinctively shrinking Slade. They flamed luridly.

"Youse little yellow leper!" he growled. "It's youse dat coughed it up!" He lunged at Slade.

Now between the two guards at the open door there was a thin gap to liberty. Thin it was, but enough for Slade, who had worldly matters yet to put in order. He ducked Mulligan's hungry hands, and with a swift spring of a body whose attenuated bulk was a decided advantage in this time of stress, he shot like a meteor between the disconcerted guards and landed in a heap upon the sidewalk outside. Bounding to his feet like a rubber ball, he darted up the alley. The furious guards, overturned by the sudden onslaught, scrambled up.

"Follow him, Dinneen!" shouted Mulligan, and Cullinan's partner obeyed, the room echoing with his curses as he rushed out.

As Slade achieved his liberty, Micky had tried to follow suit. He had nearly reached the door when the brawny hand of Mulligan shot out and connected with

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his collar. There was a backward jerk and the choking journalist landed in the middle of the room, falling over a table amid jangling beer glasses. Picking himself up rather dazedly he grinned amiably into the two scowling faces opposite him. His left hand was cut slightly by a broken glass. He drew out his handkerchief, stanching the flow of blood.

"Do you mugs provide free ambulance service for your customers," he inquired airily, "or is that extra?"

"Shut your face!" remarked Mulligan savagely. "Now ye've got that story all right, which ain't none of yer business nor yer cursed paper's, neither. Youse done up a pal o' mine here good and proper last week 'nd we bote otter lick de stuffin' outer you. But I bets as you didn't come here of yer own accord, an' I tells ye wot we'll do. You tell de man wot sent yer dat dere wasn't nuttin' doin', an' you couldn't cop nuttin', an' we lets you go. Eider dat or—" and his swollen fist fanned the acrid air an inch from Micky's nose.

Micky's keen Irish eyes weighed the ruffianly odds. A weaker spirit would have temporized or lied. However, Micky was a man. His answer left nothing to be arbitrated. It was a mere suggestion, but it held finality.

"You go to hell!" he said. The next instant his eyes, strangely distended, saw curious vivid, whirling flashes of crimson and orange and violet. His tongue, curled fantastically, writhed outward like an ant eater's. His slender hands tore futilely at brutal, strangling fists clenched upon his throat. He was simultaneously sensible of dull thudding blows about the lower part of his body, judging hazily but quite correctly that Cullinan

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was kicking him. For a moment so, while the vivid colors faded and resolved themselves gradually into jetty black, and consciousness waned. Then he heard dimly a rush of feet, felt a swift relief as the stifling hands were torn from his throat. Gasping, he rolled weakly to one side while the shadows slowly lifted from his protruding eyes. They saw what brought Micky staggering to his feet with trembling interest.

For the tables were turned, not by a relieving cordon of policemen, but by one man with vengeance in his hands. A splendid young figure, over six feet tall, he was in the center of the room, dealing it. A swift vision of yellow tousled hair, gleaming blue eyes and grim square jaw, flashed before Micky's bewildered sight. A distinct appreciation welled within him of the power behind a blow which at that instant knocked Mr. Cullinan into a corner, where he lay and shuddered. The newcomer now faced Mr. Mulligan, who, with malice burrowing in his gimlet eyes, at once fell into approved position. The rescuer laughed a great mellow, resounding laugh full into Mr. Mulligan's unlovely face. Then, dropping suddenly, he charged into the bartender in bruising gridiron style, a brawny shoulder heaving that gentleman in a disorganized heap near his annihilated partner.

The athlete straightened with another booming laugh. "Come on, kid," he shouted, "it'll be warm here in a minute." He dragged the still dazed Micky out of the door. Up to the corner they ran to a cab in waiting. They sprang in. "Courier office!" directed the stranger, then drew out his watch.

"You'll have plenty of time for your story," he ob-

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served. "I know Goldberg's, so when I happened around the office just now and Fatty told me, among other things, what was up, I didn't know as it would do any harm to drive over, seeing I'd nothing else to do. Makes a fellow feel restless to get out of the grind for a couple of weeks. You get rusty for exercise." He laughed again.

Micky remembered his talk with Stearns. "You must be—" he ventured.

"Dick Glenwood," returned the other, as they shook hands. "And you, I think I know you. Fatty told me, all in three minutes. You know he generally does."

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CHAPTER V

THE IRONWORKERS' BALL—AND MAISIE

"YOU fool!" remarked former Alderman Goldberg to his man, Mulligan, when he learned a little later that night of the spirited occurrence in his bar room. "You fool! Don't you know no better than to put it onto a newspaper guy? Don't you know he can make all kinds of trouble for us if he wants to? Don't you know nothin'? Just because he did up a pal of yours,—and God knows he had it comin' to him!—is that any reason you've got to pitch into the bloke and set a lot of bees stingin' us? You're a bright one, ain't you? You're a rotten stiff!" fulminated Goldberg, while his assistant scowled and said nothing. "I'll tell you one thing," concluded Goldberg, "if they make any trouble for me out of your fool break, you get the run, see?"

But no trouble ensued and Mulligan remained. Micky, having come out ahead, laughed at his rough treatment as a part of a good joke, being no whiner. There was no disposition at the Courier office to cause Goldberg any more trouble than it was hoped was due him after the next election, along with his mates. All the Courier's hopes were centered on that pleasing goal.

Micky's night off, a little later in the week, fell uneventfully, and it was with distinct boredom that he

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tried to kill time. He was invariably uneasy at these brief intervals of respite from the grind, and it might be said that he enjoyed himself in discontent. It was with a generally ennuied air that he sauntered at midnight into a night lunch room much frequented by the Courier staff and encountered Dick there, whom he greeted with enthusiasm. It happened that Dick was through especially early that evening.

An odd friendship had arisen between these two, so dissimilar and yet so like in the welding quality of good fellowship and thorough bohemianism. It was this restless spirit, the arch-enemy of commercial routine, that had drawn Dick into journalism after leaving college. The step was a disappointment to his father, who had hoped that Dick would elect to enter the parent's office and learn the business from the ground up. He did not oppose Dick's inclinations, however, thinking that a little experience would weary him of his idea. Thus far, however, there seemed little likelihood that Dick would leave the fascinating grind for the more substantial though more prosaic office desk. He had taken naturally to journalism, was a ready and pleasing writer, and he liked it.

It was the same restless spirit, too, linked with an inborn, luring love of roving and shift of scene, that fired O'Byrn. A happy vagabond, his eyes were filled ever with the charm of new scenes that all too soon grew old. Always were fair mirages to glow on his horizon, bringing him hurrying on—to find them faded. Dream-houses, built on barren sands, dissolving in mists of tears as the years spell the bitter, brutal thing that we call wisdom! Always for him, strange little Irishman, the luring whis-

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per from afar and the mad dash thither, to find as before only chill mists and brooding shadows; and so on, over the wastes, to silence and the end.

"What have you done with yourself?" inquired Dick, as the two settled themselves comfortably before their sandwiches and coffee. "Find anything worth while?"

"Oh, early in the evenin' I dropped into Ryan's roof garden," replied Micky. "The first stunt wasn't so bad; then they rang in one of those cockney carolers from dear ol' Lunnon. He got off a yowl about—

" 'Wipe no more, my lidy,
Oh, wipe no more to die—'

and I got out. Suggested a scullery strike and business, and it was my night off.

"Blew along and met a bunch of the boys at the Gold Coin. They had started in early and were left-handed in both feet and hangin' onto the bar like a freighter in a recedin' tide. They tried to annex me, but I faded away. I'm through. The budge-mixer's the natural enemy of the profesh. He gets your money and you get next, but it's never till the next morning. I knew a district attorney once, up north, who had been prosecutin' a gang of cheap thieves from a bum district of the county. He was gettin' off his final spiel, and it was a beaut'. 'Gentlemen of the jury,' he yells, 'they don't raise anything on the Pine Plains but hell and huckleberries!' and it was no lie.

"Now on whisky the product's even more limited. You just raise hell. No more for me, I'm stickin' to suds. It's popular, the red-eye, but it doesn't last and then it does. There's nothing in it but a pneumatic head

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and a nimbus of cracked ice in the mornin'. Your Uncle Mike—Why, hello, Fatty!"

Fatty Stearns had ambled in and stood regarding them with a tender smile. Glenwood pulled him into a chair and invited him to order what he wanted. Stearns was soon busy.

"Just ran out for lunch," came from him in muffled tones. "I'm up to my neck in that golf game you didn't have time to do," he told Glenwood with a reproachful glance. "It's got me wingin'."

There were strange gurglings from Micky, grown suddenly wild-eyed. "Fatty, Fatty!" he moaned. "Did you say 'game?'"

"Sure he did!" answered Dick truculently. "What's the matter with it, you little ape? I play it."

Micky dissolved in simulated sobs. "He plays it!" he groaned. "Oh, why was he ever born, Eliza? Better never have been born than born a slave!"

"We will listen, Micky," remarked Dick deliberately, "to any objections you have to the greatest, most healthful—"

"Oh, fudge!" interrupted Micky. "I was there once and it's a wonder I didn't turn out a lush for life. Honest, I'd done everything in my time, but that assignment got me wingin'. I get cross-eyed yet every time I think about it and I talk really maudlin. I can't tell what I say those times but the boys say it's fierce. Say I murmur fool talk about putting it onto the green and bawling on the bunkers. I don't know. I guess I got it all in my head that time, but somehow I never could make it jibe.

"You see it was when I was on the Signal in Gulf

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City. Old man sent for me one day and says, 'There's a three-day golf meet starts tomorrow morning and it's up to you.'

"Now ordinarily I'm the last to buck at any assignment, but I'd seen a fellow dislocate his jaw once on some of the vocabulary of that game, so I sparred for wind.

" 'I don't know anything about it,' says I.

" 'Neither does anyone else,' says he.

" 'Do the players?' I asks him.

" 'Damfino!' he came back at me. 'Ask 'em. That's what you're for.'

"So behold your Uncle Mike, Dick, about nine the next morning looping the links. I had done a fuss stunt and was got up regardless. Had one of those long cutaways that dallied with my ankles; they hadn't gone out in Gulf City. I saw a bunch of busy boys humped up around a dinky flag and started for 'em to ask 'em about it. One of 'em, I judged, was gettin' ready to whale a toad or somethin' with an umbrella handle. He'd hocked his hat and hadn't kept much more than his shirt on anyway; barrin' a pair of pants that had got elephant-tiss-siss-siss, or whatever you call it, and looked like they came off the pile way back in the happy hitherto. His shirt sleeves were rolled up and his arms were the color of sun-cured tobacco, or the mud pies that sister used to bake. Oh, he was a beam-baked child of nature all right. Well, he sees me comin' toward him, and straightens up and gives me the cold storage stare.

" 'Here, you!' he yells, 'I can't drive over you!'

" 'No, you bet you can't!' I yells back. 'Ain't it scandalous you can't? Why can't you? Did you hock

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the horse along with the hat? Here, go buy yourself a new one of both!' and I tosses him a dime.

"They didn't say anything but it grew kind o' chilly, so I turns up my coat collar and wanders along and by and by I came to the club house.

"It was gorgeous enough around there, looked like the short end at the surrender of Yorktown. My fuss stunt looked like mourning in that color scheme. I drifted around, feelin' lonesome and like a drab tassel on a red fringe. It was a new one on me, but by and by I got a look-in on the pools. They had a set of cards tacked on the board.

"There was a big geezer in a sunrise coat goin' by just then. I annexed him. 'What's those?' I asked him, pointin' to the cards.

" 'Why, the scores, of course,' says he, tryin' to jerk away.

" 'Well, how many times do they score before they start?' I asks, hangin' on. And honestly, Dick, I didn't know. I was one up in the air with the parachute busted, and it certainly looked slow to me.

"He broke away, wouldn't answer me at all. It was no way to treat a lonesome tassel. He deserved to be censured for turning me adrift.

"Well, after awhile I struck a pretty decent guy, if he did wear a horse blanket for a vest. He said he'd help me out, that the scorers were busy. I suppose they were flaggin' the bad actors.

"This accommodatin' chap began to go over the cards with me. I got along all right for a while till I got to an X mark. 'What's this?' I asked him.

" 'Oh,' says he, 'that's because he struck his caddy.'

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"'For how much?' I asks. 'Besides, I supposed the caddies were the ones to strike. They need the money. What races has this bloke been playin' lately? Must have bet on some brute that ran like cold molasses.'

"'You don't understand,' says he. 'He struck his caddy with the ball. It knocks him out.'

"'I should think it would,' says I, running my finger down the list. 'Here's a fellow with two X's. That's two down, ain't it? I should think a ten-strike would make a caddy feel sore for fair.'

"'It makes a player use language when he does that,' says the accommodatin' chap, starin' at the board and lookin' reminiscent.

"'Does the caddy contribute?' I asked him.

"He didn't pay any attention to that, but kept on lookin' dreamy-eyed. But I wanted to find out about things, so I kept at him.

"'Say,' I says, 'I notice every once in a while one of those guys yells 'Fore!' That means he's just hit the caddy four times, doesn't it? The caddy gets all that's comin' to him, doesn't he?'

"And with that he came to and gave me a sad look-over. Then he faded away and I floated around lonesome again, lookin' for some one to put me wise. After a while I heard a couple of swell dames talkin'.

"'Theah,' one of 'em says, 'my deah, see those two young men? They ah the Sherrod twins. I declaiah, they ah so much alike that I cawn't tell one from the othah. One of them's an expert golfah, but I declaiah, I cawn't tell which one he is. I cawn't guess why he isn't playing today. The othah one doesn't play at all.'

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"I took a look, and sure enough, they were as near alike as campaign promises. My move was cut out for me all right and I made a stab at it. I steered up against one of 'em and buttonholed him.

" 'Say,' says I, 'are you you or your brother?'

"He looked kind of wild for a minute, but steadied. 'Why, I guess I'm me,' he says, as if he wasn't sure of it.

" 'Well, you're the man I'm lookin' for,' says I. 'The other one doesn't play.' Sure enough, he was the right one. He was all right, barrin' the mashie microbe, and he started in to put me next. It would have been all hunk, only he was the soul of hospitality and I always hate to say no. Besides, I wanted to forget it.

"It was highballs till sunset and then I went away after sticking out both fins for farewell shakes with him both, for he looked like both him and his twin to me. It must have been a mistake, for I have a hazy recollection that the one who didn't play left early. Anyway, my friend might have been a sextette or a full chorus choir, for they all looked alike to me about that time. I got down town, thinkin' about writin' my story every now and then, and I fell in with a gang.

"The last I remember of that story I was in the back room of a saloon tryin' to write it. I was writin' about two words to a page about then, though once in a while I would make an extra brace and get in three. It was 'steen down and a bluff to play with me and I was foozled for fair. My stuff wouldn't make sense. It just gibbered. I don't know just when I called it off, but I think it was just after I had scrawled a screed to the effect that 'Willie Van Hackensack, instead of approach-

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ing the tea as he should, had bunked hazardous highballs till he was batty in his loft.' It was no lie, either, only it didn't belong in the story.

"That story never got to the Signal, Fatty, and I didn't either. It got lost somewhere and so did I. I came out of it about a week later, with Gulf City 'way back beyant the blue and me sitting by the old familiar track, waiting for a freight.

"No golf in mine, Dick, it holed me for fair. It's an excuse, that's all. When you aren't out huntin' low balls you're inside huntin' highballs. After a while you can't tell a mashie from a ball bat. I don't know what a mashie is, but I do know what a highball bat is. It's generally a job, unless you break it off in the middle. Do you follow me, Fatty? If you do, I'm sorry for you."

It was with a windy sigh and a look of added dejection that Fatty Stearns rose to return to the office and finish his account of the golf tourney. "Just forget what Micky told you," called Dick after him, "or you'll get all mixed up and get the run in the morning." Then he surveyed Micky with that smile, so exasperating in golfers, the smile of forgiving pity for the man outside.

"Of course, you never played, Micky," he remarked. "If you ever had—"

"Forget it, Dick," said Micky briskly. "I want to. Say, do you dance?"

"Why, I don't know," answered Dick doubtfully, taken aback by the swift change of subject. "Ask some of my partners. I'm in doubt myself and aching to know."

"And they know and are aching," grinned Micky. "Well, we'll try you out. Come on," he added, rising,

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"let's go over to the Ironworkers' ball. They'll be going for an hour yet." They left the cafe, and after a little bolted up the wide stairway of a big brick block. Encountering a stalwart young fellow behind a ticket table on a landing, Dick's hand sought his pocket. Micky restrained him, and nodding to the sentry, who knew him, they passed up to the final landing, where a burst of music saluted them. A number of couples were "cooling off" there. Dick peered curiously inside. "How do they dance in such a crush?" he inquired.

"Why, when these husky guys are dancin' with 'em," explained Micky, "their feet don't touch the floor at all, and the men don't count."

Indeed, the brawny cavaliers were well nigh making Micky's comment good. The prompter, a big red-faced fellow with a bull's voice, just then roared, "Swing your partners!" It was the relished order, for every ironworker there had from earliest dancing days devoted himself without mercy to the mastery of the art of swinging. At the welcome call, each swain, an arm encircling his partner's waist gently but firmly, placed one calloused paw against the lady's back, just below the shoulder blades, while her palm sought his arm. His other hand sought her free one and extended it out sideways and a little upward. This served a double purpose, sufficing to fend off danger from colliding circlers and to add impetus to the ensuing maelstrom. Then, while the fiddlers bent to their work, there whizzed a general centrifugal whirl, with a soft scuff of pivoting feet and the swish of agitated lingerie. That it was as delightful as dizzying was evidenced by the appreciative comments of the breathless

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fair, as the spinning knights halted them, preparatory to starting the next figure.

"I'm a thirty-third on that," announced Micky complacently. "Can you do it, Dick?"

Dick was dubious. "Well, probably they'll have a waltz or two-step next," proceeded Micky reassuringly. "They sandwich in round ones after every square deal lately. Gettin' what Bill Nye called ray-sher-shay. Come on, here's one I know. I'll put you next for the next." He dragged Dick over to a big blonde and left them introduced and waiting for a two-step.

The quadrille ended and Micky watched the dancers scrambling for seats, of which there were an insufficiency. The overflow billowed out upon the landing, laughing and demanding room at the open windows. Micky, from the doorway, beheld with sudden interest a vision seated across the hall. He grasped an acquaintance by the arm.

"Say, Lacy," he demanded impetuously, "if you know that, knock me down to it, will you?"

So Micky was conveyed across the room and formally knocked down to Miss Maisie Muldoon. The end was well worth his enterprise. Small and prettily formed, with eyes of truest Irish blue, the loveliest shade of brown hair extant and a complexion of milk and roses, she was charming. She was simply gowned in duck skirt and an airy confection of diaphanous white waist, which revealed tantalizing glimpses of sweet white neck and arms. Micky mentally registered her "a dream."

"Will you dance?" he asked, crowding into a seat beside her.

"Oh, I don't know, Mr.—er—O'Byrn," she answered.

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"My card seems to be full already. I might give you an extra, if they have one," with a mischievous glance.

"You might scratch half a dozen of those names," suggested Micky easily, "and substitute mine. It looks prettier."

"I believe you're a newspaper man, aren't you?" freezingly. "Seems to me I've heard so."

"How do you like 'em?" he demanded, his impudent eyes twinkling.

"If you're any sample, they seem to have a crust," witheringly.

"So does any good thing," he chuckled. "Don't you like pie?"

She laughed in spite of herself. "Say," she acknowledged, turning her charming face toward his freckled one with decided interest, "you ain't so worse! I almost wish I had a dance for you."

"Maybe one of 'em will die," said Micky hopefully. "If I can be of any help—"

"The music's starting," she interrupted. "It's a two-step and I've got it with Billy Ryan. He's rotten on that. Are you?"

"I'm probably the ripest peach of a two-stepper," averred Micky, "that ever triangled down a floor. I'm a pippin. Where is your gazabe?"

"I don't know," she replied, looking about frowningly. "Maybe he won't come." Micky waxed complacent at the discreet hope lingering in her tone.

The dance was well under way. Dick shuffled past, the big blonde in his arms. He seemed enjoying himself. Micky grew impatient.

"Went out for another drink, I guess," remarked Miss

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Maisie disgustedly, in another moment. "Come on, I sha'n't wait for him," and she rose.

"Went a block for a beer with a Manhattan right inside," murmured Micky, as they prepared to start. "Oh, you g'wan!" she laughed, and they swung into the revolving circle.

Micky's boast of terpsichorean ability made good, (he had picked up the art long before, as readily as he did everything else,) he was rewarded with two more regulars and an extra before the affair ended. One of the regulars was originally scheduled with the recreant Ryan, who appeared for it in due course and retired congealed, with a black look at the grinning O'Byrn. The other regular had originally been Miss Muldoon's cousin's. She transferred it airily, but the cousin bore it with the equanimity of a mere relative.

"I suppose you've got company home?" inquired Micky, with a certain mournful hesitation, as they were finishing the last dance.

"Not yet," she answered demurely. "That is," with a flash of blue eyes, "Mr. Ryan brought me but he sha'n't take me back. He's too thirsty. That first dance you got was the second he'd missed with me."

"Forget him!" breathed Micky ecstatically. "I'm in luck." He invariably took things for granted.

"But," she recollected, chilling somewhat, "I haven't accepted your escort yet, Mr.—er—O'Byrn. I never met you till tonight."

"O, happy night!" he retorted, with the impudence that time would never wither nor custom stale. "Aren't you glad you came?"

She laughed again, a girlish, joyous laugh that warmed

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the heart in the hearing. "I'm it," she averred. "You are certainly the limit. But you aren't in such luck as you think. It's a long way home."

"Never too long with you for a pacemaker," he assured her. "And luck—I know the varieties. I've had all kinds." So, as the last waltz ceased and the dancers prepared for departure, he hastened to the door, where Dick was waiting for him, and dismissed that gentleman. Glenwood raised his eyebrows comprehensively and departed alone.

The way was short to Mulberry avenue, all too short for Micky, and as for the lady—well, it would have seemed longer had the discredited Ryan been in her company. There was the first faint hint of dawn in the shrouded sky as Micky left the girl at her door and turned away, with her gracious permission to call on his next night off. So Micky turned to retrace the way now suddenly grown long; agitated stirrings in his warm Irish heart that he could not have explained, those first faint harbingers that come to us all, poor children of fleeting youth, and are stilled ere we can understand.

Ah, youth! with its thrilled pulses and fragrant, unspoiled heart, its mysteries divine—and the arid waste beyond, when dreams are done! It's a long way home, indeed!

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CHAPTER VI

THE WEB

A WHOLESALE liquor establishment supplied a portion of Shaughnessy's income. Time was, some years before, when it had demanded all of its proprietor's time and undeniable talents, but now a gradually increasing if reprehensible sphere of usefulness had made it a side-issue. However, it continued to yield its owner a satisfying revenue and the wicked prospered, after the fashion of this good old world.

The fourth ward, contiguous to Goldberg's, while free and easy enough, in very truth, was respectable in comparison with the notorious fifth. It was in this fourth ward, in the quietest district, that Shaughnessy's wholesale house was located. It was in the dingy office of this old brick building that the dark schemes were matured which, with the aid of the worst elements in the city, dominated its affairs. Here Shaughnessy reigned supreme, an unobtrusive king.

Shaughnessy sat at his desk one warm evening holding converse with his two faithful satellites, Abe Goldberg and Dick Peterson. The office was carefully closed to chance encroachment and the men talked in subdued tones. As usual, the cabal's plans had been carefully discussed, then the conversation shifted to a minor mat-

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ter. It was the offense of which Nick Slade had been guilty, in aiding the journalistic enemy by telling O'Byrn of the row at Goldberg's saloon. Slade, by the way, was a heeler under the direct charge of Peterson, and he had done work which had commended him to that astute though apparently unsophisticated worthy.

"He ought to get the run," Goldberg growled. "What use is a man to us that don't stand by the gang? Of course, that row wasn't exactly mixed up with our doings, but a lot of our men was mixed up in it, and it ain't the kind of advertising that's goin' to do us any good. Then this Slade goes and tips off the whole business. He ought to be kicked out."

"Hold on, Goldberg," said Peterson. "I know all about the deal. I've talked with Slade. Now you know Slade is shady with the police. Of course, there are others, but they've got it in for Slade for more than one reason and he ain't important enough to be immune. As luck would have it, they were going to nab him the other night for a piece of light-fingered work that he didn't happen to be concerned with. This Courier chap, who seems to be a corker anyway, had picked up acquaintance with Slade in some way, and, more than that, he happened to know the right party the police were after and he got Slade off. Well, what could Slade do when the fellow asked for the tip at your place? Of course, he could have turned him down flat, but that wouldn't have been natural, would it?"

Before Goldberg could reply, Shaughnessy's cold voice cut in. "Is he worth while?" he asked of Peterson.

"He's O. K.," replied that worthy, with conviction. "One of the best—"

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Shaughnessy turned to Goldberg. "Then forget it," he said dryly. "Keep on using him, if he's any good. He's hardly worth firing. Exercise your firing privilege for the officers' quarters; you need the men in the ranks."

With which characteristic bit of philosophy, Shaughnessy stretched his arms and yawned. The others rose, the conference having been closed, and lighting fresh cigars, left the office. Shaughnessy was left alone. He leaned back lazily in his office chair, his thin hands clasped behind his head, his expressionless eyes watching the smoke that curled upward leisurely from the tip of his cigar. His white face would hold no more of immobility when he should lie dead. Under the gaslight he reclined at ease, staring upward. In the eyes, the queer, black, heavy-lided eyes, there was a momentary lack alike of definite scrutiny or the soft, impalpable veil that is drawn by transitory dreams of better things. Rather were they like a sluggish serpent's; lustreless, foreboding, unwinking and infinitely, sleeplessly sinister. They stared with a reptilian fixedness, seeing nothing. Thus for a space, and then they lighted with a gleam of strange malevolence, as the thin, grim lips of Shaughnessy relaxed under the small black moustache in a smile that was not good to see. Some secret reflection had evidently pleased the boss.

He suddenly leaned forward in his chair and turned to his desk, extracting some papers which he surveyed with quiet satisfaction and replaced. As he did so he started violently, then sank back in his chair, his face drawn lugubriously with sudden pain; the natural pallor giving place to a ghastly gray. His hands were clasped at his left side and he gasped for breath. In a moment

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the paroxysm passed, and Shaughnessy sat limp in his chair with sprawling legs and nerveless hands, his head bent forward. Presently he sought his handkerchief with shaking fingers and wiped the cold beads of perspiration from his forehead. Then he rose slowly, and with trembling knees tottered to a small cupboard and produced a flask and glass. Pouring out a stiff draught of brandy, he swallowed it at a gulp, replaced the bottle and glass and walked back to his chair. His eyes, again inscrutable, sought the clock; his face, once more an impassive mask, was turned toward the door. Shaughnessy was game.

A moment more and there was the sound of footsteps outside, then a cautious tapping summoned at the door. Shaughnessy stepped forward and released the spring lock which had confined it, standing aside to allow his visitor's entrance, then snapped the door shut. Placing a chair conveniently, he motioned his caller into it and resumed his own seat.

The caller sat regarding Shaughnessy with an odd nervousness. He was plainly ill at ease. An old man he was, with gray hair and beard and faded blue eyes, whose wonted amiability was just now shadowed by an unmistakable expression of helplessness. A pair of gold-bowed eyeglasses dangled at the end of a silken cord looped about his collar; the cut and texture of his black garb indicated prosperity as well as solid respectability. The impression was heightened by the old-fashioned high collar and the white lawn tie. The thin white hands, on which the blue veins showed prominently, nervously fumbled a black slouch hat. Shaughnessy's eyes rested an instant upon the headgear.

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"You ordinarily wear a silk hat, don't you, Judge?" he asked. "What's the matter? Isn't this part of the town good enough for it, or does this one help to shade your eyes from the light?" The visitor winced and the boss smiled cruelly.

"One has to be careful,—" began the old man, and hesitated.

"Sure," acquiesced the leader, grimly. "A good many eyes would open to see you in here with me. And I suppose you left your carriage a few blocks back and walked? Your discretion does you credit. Well, you can afford to come here better than you can afford to have me go to your house, which I should have done if you had not wisely concluded to accept my polite invitation to call. Some of your holy neighbors would have been surprised, wouldn't they? Well, Judge, saving your venerable presence, they generally have to come to me,—because I know things."

The spare form fidgeted, the faded blue eyes sought waveringly Shaughnessy's black ones that were now quickened with a baleful fire. "What do you want?" asked the visitor. "I am an old man,—I was through long since—"

Shaughnessy bent forward. "No, you are not through," he said with a softness that was metallic. "You are not through while you live and I need you. Understand that! You served me on the bench; you shall serve me now! Else—" He paused significantly while his companion's face whitened. "Now listen. I am coming to be known; you are not. You are respectable!" with an ugly sneer. "Now this is the programme, and it'll feaze the yelping fools that are after me, just as

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it'll feaze you, my dear friend, in a minute. The Democratic convention will be held just before the 'Cits' hold theirs. The 'Cits' are inconveniently in earnest this year and they're talking of putting up a man who'll cause us trouble. Now there'll be a dummy candidate, a machine man, in the Democratic convention, who'll be mine. Well, he'll be knocked out; decency will give the old Democracy heart disease by swooping down on her out of a clear sky; there'll be an honored name proposed that'll sweep the convention off its feet, and that honored name, my dear Judge, will be your own!"

The old man sprang to his feet, shivering as with the ague. He shook impotent, furious fists, his pale eyes glaring. "Damn you!" he cried, "I won't do it! Never! never! do you understand,—you—devil?"

Shaughnessy's hand closed on an object on his desk. He rose, shaking a bundle of documents in his caller's face. "I understand," he muttered menacingly, "and—you understand. You understand that you will serve as the next mayor of this city—or you will serve time!"

The old man fell into his chair and buried his face in his hands, while Shaughnessy smiled, his eyes alight with malice.

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CHAPTER VII

LONELINESS

A BIG figure arose from a desk at the opposite side of the room. Glenwood handed in a bulky wad of matter to be read and strolled over to O'Byrn's desk. Throwing himself into a convenient chair, he produced his cigar case. They lighted weeds and sat for a time in congenial if smoky silence.

It was Micky's night off, but it was early. He was loitering about the office for a few moments before leaving to fulfill an engagement that had become usual. He now sat regarding Glenwood appreciatively. What a man he was, to be sure! He sat at indolent ease, his feet on Micky's desk, hands clasped behind his handsome blonde head, staring dreamily far beyond the littered room. He wore no coat. Micky marked the deep chest, the swell of the splendid muscles outlined beneath the folds of the soft outing shirt, the well set neck. There was the suggestion, none the less strong in repose, of mingled virility and grace. Strength of great scope was here, strength that had once against odds rescued him, O'Byrn, from an unpleasant predicament.

How puny was he, O'Byrn, by contrast, physically—and morally. Ah, but that last thought stung! For here was a man who was thoroughly master of himself,

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without being a milksop. His was no pedestal. He was one of the boys, yet liberty did not spell license with him. There was for him no painful crawl up a slippery toboggan of renewed intentions, following a wild, shooting descent that had left him gasping and breathless at the bottom. Glenwood's was the absolutely perfect mechanism of the normal. Tough fibred, richly endowed in mental, moral and physical equipment from long generations of right livers, how different was his lot from O'Byrn's, cursed at the outset with a vicious appetite which had been fostered from the beginning by the man who had bequeathed it; hampered, too, with an indifferent physique that rendered the more hopeless the boy's struggles with his mastering vice. True, after all, mused Micky bitterly, that men are created equal in only limited senses.

He rose abruptly and walked to the window, staring out into the soft night, for the ebon had settled down. Close by loomed the shadowy bulk of the city hall, dwarfing the stark ambitious blocks that were its lesser neighbors. Under the luminous moon glittered an adjacent church spire; stars peppered the curtained sky. Far down, amid the glare of myriad electric lights, there arose the faint roll of carriage wheels, drowned the next moment in the rumble of passing street cars. Within there sounded the sharp click of typewriters; in a sudden lull there was audible the ticking of a telegraph key at the end of the room. A man entered hastily, seated himself before a desk and began to write like mad. Another young fellow, after a few brief words from the city editor, seized his hat and hurried on a mission. The room was unwontedly busy for so early an hour.

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Copy boys scurried, telephone bells rang, editors summoned and reporters scuttled. Always there poured into the great room, in strange and turbulent contrast to the wideflung peace of dead white moon and watching stars in the black night sky outside, the unresting flood, the formidable torrent of life and death and the joys and ills that lurk between, called News.

Micky stared out of the window, oblivious to the whirl within. It would have distracted a novice. To the veteran it meant only the inevitable environment of effort. Many such find it difficult to write in the midst of quietude. Of such was Micky, and so it was that, with no scribbling to do, he could lose himself in vague, sad contemplation of moon and stars and black night sky, with the roar of the flood no louder in his unheeding ears than the ripple of a little river through June meadows. It was with a start that he was recalled to earth with a violent slap upon his thin shoulder. He turned, eyes still wool-gathering, to confront Dick.

"What's the dream?" demanded that worthy, smiling down at him. "Isn't this something new?"

"Why," answered Micky, a little confusedly, "I was thinking. Yes," with a laugh but with sober eyes, "it's something new, Dick, I guess. It would be better if it were oftener," a little wistfully.

Dick, staring out of the window, readily fell in with his mood. "Thinking? Yes, it's a good thing,—sometimes. But you don't have much time for it in this business."

"No," rejoined Micky thoughtfully. "You need to put in all your hustling on the job, and it don't give you time for a heavy load under your roof." He glanced at

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the clock. "Well, I must be going. Didn't know it was so late. Gimme a cigar."

Dick produced one and Micky proceeded to light up. Dick surveyed the other's unwonted immaculateness with an air of understanding. "Give her my regards," he said.

"Her?" repeated Micky, in simulated amazement. "Nit; you're off. I'm going to cut coupons tonight; they're accumulating on me." He vanished with a grin and Dick sauntered back to his desk.

Micky descended in the elevator and stepped forth into the cool night air. He stood for a moment in indecision, debating whether he should take a car. Too fine a night to ride, he decided, and started down the street at a brisk pace. Presently leaving the crowded thoroughfare for a quieter side street, he proceeded southward. After a half an hour's walk he turned a final corner and was on Mulberry Avenue. Down the street he went to a modest little dwelling, with a light shining from the shaded parlor windows. He ascended the steps and rang the bell. The door opened. Micky stepped inside and they entered the tiny parlor.

The door communicating with the sitting room opened ever so cautiously. A freckled, inquisitive face appeared unobtrusively in the gap, but Maisie saw it. "Terence!" she exclaimed, and the face disappeared. Maisie slammed the door shut with asperity, then, taking a seat near it, turned her pretty face toward her caller. "You're late, Micky," said she reprovingly. Micky was progressive. It had not taken him long to induce her to address him by his Christian name.

"Yes," admitted Micky. "I didn't know it was so late.

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I forgot to wind my watch, anyway. What time is it?" He moved toward her, his timepiece in his hand. It was an old silver hunting-case affair. In fumbling with the spring to open it, the rear cover opened, disclosing the faded picture of a woman. Micky held it out to the girl.

"My mother," he said simply. "She died when I was little." Maisie looked at the sweet face and patient eyes a moment, then her look sought Micky's face. It held an unwonted gravity, the blue eyes were a little misty. He leaned over her, his gaze bent upon the dial of her smart little watch.

"Eight forty-five, eh?" he exclaimed. "Whew! it is late." He set his watch and then began winding it. "That case is loose, I must get it fixed," he pursued. He glanced again at the girl's timepiece, then whimsically shook his own. "Not much like yours, is it?" he said, with a sorry smile. "Poor little turnip! But it'll be buried with me, Maisie, I'll never have another. I don't want another. You see,—she gave it to me."

He sank into a chair, his face in the shadow. "I can see it now," he pursued in a low voice, "just as if it was yesterday. How tickled I was! and so was she, to see me so. There were just us two, and now—I'm alone. Oh! it's years ago, but it's one of those things that'll hurt every time I remember it—now she's gone—will hurt till I go, too! Of course it didn't cost her much, poor little woman. It couldn't; she didn't have it. How she managed to save the few poor dollars for it, God knows; I can't figure it. But she did, and one day when I got in from selling my papers, she met me and gave it to me. And I was only a kid, Maisie, and I up and bellered like a

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calf, with my arms around her,—and she cried, too; and it wasn't very long,—" his voice broke for a moment,—"it wasn't very long after that,—it was dark and cold I remember, and snowflakes in the air,—and I was crying and trying to pull away from them while they were leading me away—from—her grave."

It was very still. The girl averted her eyes; they were full of tears. O'Byrn sat in the shadow, his head bent. In a moment he resumed.

"I've knocked around from pillar to post since then, Maisie, from one end of the land to the other. I've lived high and low, from glad rags to just plain rags. I could always get a job—and I could always lose it. Oh, yes, I might as well be frank," with a bitter laugh. "It's whisky—a heritage. Not all the time—fits that I can't help—every now and then—like bad dreams, only worse—they're real! It's at those times that the old feeling grips me, too,—to keep movin'. Why, I usually wake up where everything's strange—and I have to ask 'em where I am. I've been on the road to something worth while so often—and always kicked it over. And it cropped out in me so young! You'd be surprised—"

"Oh, don't!" she cried. He stared at her mutely. "What makes you say such horrible things about yourself?" she pursued passionately, a quiver in her voice. "Do you want me to believe—"

"The truth," he interrupted, gently. "Only the truth. Of course, I haven't known you long, but it seems like all my life. I'd feel like a yellow dog, somehow, if I shouldn't tell you. But then, we won't say anything more about it. I'm not to blame, exactly; it was a present. We'll go back, there isn't much to tell. It's

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always been the newspaper business with me. Odds and ends at first, then they found I could write, and I've been at it ever since. I wasn't much on education, but I've picked up quite a lot, and I've seen the country. Oh, I've had my dreams. Maybe I could do something sometime—if—" He broke off abruptly.

She sprang up, coming quickly to him. Her little hand sought his arm. "Micky," she breathed softly, with shining eyes, "do it! You can; it's in you; if you will only leave off—and you can—you must! Think of her, Micky,—she cried over you—perhaps she's crying yet! Make her smile, instead! Oh, what makes me talk to you like this, only knowing you a few weeks? What right—"

He caught her hand as she moved slowly away and drew her back. "What right?" he echoed warmly. "The best in the world! It does me good! You're a true friend, you are, and you can see what a mess I've made of my life and how I could do better if I would—or could, for you don't know what I have to fight against, Maisie." He drew a chair for her close to his own. "But then, I'm young yet," he pursued, with a rather sorry smile. "Time yet, perhaps, for dreams. Dreams!" he repeated, with a queer, half-shamed look, "how the fellows at the office would laugh to hear me say that! They'd say I'd gone bug-house."

"Dreams?" she repeated softly, a divine smile in her wistful eyes, "why, Micky, we're all dreamers. Between here and the store—the store and here, day after day, don't you suppose they help me; the dreams? Doesn't it help your work—your old humdrum work, whatever it is, without any beginning or ending—

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doesn't it help to mix a little dreaming with it? Of course, it doesn't really help me—I'm a poor, silly little thing—but it can help you, Micky—it can help you!"

"'Poor, silly little thing!'" he repeated after her, his eyes moistening. "Don't, Maisie, it makes me feel like a fool! Why, I'm not fit to speak to you, girl! The life I've lived—Oh, the road is where I belong, after all! And the dreams—why, they're just dreams, that's all. I'd only have to try to realize them to prove it—and I'm afraid. Yes, when I haven't been drunk, I've been afraid."

She winced at the word, while he, unheeding, stared gloomily at the carpet. "What—" she began hesitantly, and stopped. He looked up, comprehending.

"To write," he said simply. "To write instead of scribble. Oh, I can see things—and I can feel 'em. Seems to me that I could do it—but it looms up so that I don't dare try. And sometimes I get into the proper mood, and get squared away—and then—" He broke off with a despairing gesture.

"I don't know much about those things, of course," she said, "but I like to read what I can, and it seems to me that feelin' like you do about it—I mean it's lookin' so big to you—that you ought to be all the more able to do it."

He stared at her. This subtle viewpoint had never struck him before. "By George, it takes a girl, after all, to hit the nail square," he told her. "I never thought of it. But say,—why—it's encouraging, it is!"

"Sure it is." She smiled at him. "You want to get busy."

He stared wide-eyed in sudden reverie, his eyes wistful, his freckled face softened with something that contrasted

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oddly enough with his ordinary reckless, devil-may-care attitude toward the world. His better side was uppermost; somehow this girl could always summon it. But now, as she watched him mutely, a swift shadow darkened his face.

"Yes," he told her, "perhaps I ought to be encouraged by the way I feel about it, and get busy. I could if I was built right, but I'm not, Maisie. I can't get settled and I haven't any balance wheel. It's 'off again, on again, gone again' with me. I can't get fairly into a place before the old itch to keep moving bothers me, and with the other, the combination keeps me shifting. Why, I seem to be a whole bunch of fellows mixed up in a free-for-all, sometimes," he added, with a forlorn smile. "Other fellows can get down to a steady grind and climb; I can't. God knows I want to, sometimes." He gave her a queer look; she did not seem to notice.

"And then," he pursued, "I've never had a home, you know, not since the poor little mother died. Of course, that wasn't much of a home to look at, but she was there, and I've never had one since. Oh, it's been so lonesome sometimes; you don't know. It's the man who goes jumping over the world alone, here today and there tomorrow, that knows what lonesomeness is. It's that, I tell you, that's raised the devil with me. Perhaps I'm wrong, but it seems to me that if it had been with me like it is with others I'd have been different. I've known fellows inclined the same way as I am, but they settled down and got homes, and now—why, they've got me beat out of sight."

"Well," she queried eagerly, "why don't you—" and stopped suddenly, her cheeks crimsoning, for Micky's

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disturbed face had with her unthinking words grown suddenly tense with purpose. A flash of realization had revealed to him his great need, the influence to anchor him and hold him fast against the restless, turbid tide that sought to sweep him away. Why, he needed—her! On the word of this slip of a girl hung his opportunity for a new and better world; a world for two, two who might work, one for the other,—and climb; a world in which dreams might come true. In a moment it would have all been poured forth in broken, incoherent phrase, the sum of Micky's illumining dream and his desire. But the girl, with the unerring instinct of her sex, divined the situation and in quick alarm frustrated O'Byrn's intention, though very gently.

"Well," she said, smiling at him brightly, "we've had a good talk, haven't we? I'm glad you told me about—everything. I know you'll win, it's in you. And now—I know you won't mind—but it's gettin' late, and I have to get up early, you know."

So Micky, effectually forestalled, went away with settled gloom shadowing his freckled face. For a long time after he had gone the girl sat by the window, the light turned low; young eyes staring sombrely out upon the darkened street; young, fearful soul oppressed by the soft encroaching shadow of the divinest of life's mysteries.

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CHAPTER VIII

AN EVENING CALL

IT was early in the evening and some of the Courier's reportorial staff were in the office, waiting for late assignments. As often happened when a few moments of leisure allowed, there was an animated group in the corner, with O'Byrn occupying the center. The political situation was beginning to grow warmer, so it naturally followed that Shaughnessy was the subject of conversation.

Micky had just been indulging in what Dick Glenwood called one of his "bursts of indiscriminate philosophy." "This game of politics," he declared, "is getting to be a science in solitaire. It's up to you to play it alone and use the rest of 'em for pawns, if you want to win out. Now, look at Shaughnessy. He fools his bowers, right and left. He annexes the whole graft. His gang of four-flushers think it's a divvy, but the boss has the wad and they're gettin' one-half of one per cent handouts. What a graft it is! I read in a paper the other day of a sign in front of an eat-joint in a Western boom town. It read:

MEALS, 25 CENTS.

SQUARE MEALS, 50 CENTS.

GORGE, 75 CENTS.

But Shaughnessy's doin' a lot better than that. He's gettin' gorged without payin' for it."

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"Where did he hail from?" asked Peters. "Isn't indigenous, is he?"

"Please remember, Pete," remarked Dick, in a pained tone, "that kind of vocabulary is barred outside your copy writing, and even then must never be used unless you've lost your book of synonyms. You positively must never throw verbal lugs into us like that. As for Shaughnessy, he isn't whatever you call it. He came here from the devil knows where a dozen years ago and annexed Goldberg, the gentleman that's so popular with Micky. Mr. Shaughnessy had enjoyed a good ward training somewhere and was quick to catch onto the possibilities of that section of the town. His connection with politics has always been of the quietest nature, but he's popularly supposed to rule the roost. They say, too, he's long on aspirations and hopes humbly for the ultimate possession of the state."

"Newspapers are dead against him," observed Mead; "at least, all that count."

"Two of 'em weren't till lately," responded Dick dryly. "He had 'em bought, body and soul, till they had a row with him on a question of patronage and did a chameleon change for political virtue. He's got his own Messenger —good name for that organ. He's the owner of that sheet, though he doesn't figure in the firm name. There's the Courier, of course, and our rival over the way must have fought him from the first, but the good in this city mostly died young, I guess."

"'Tisn't that," put in Micky, from the midst of a placid cloud of cigar smoke. "There's enough of the decent element in this place to shelve Shaughnessy, if you could rouse it. But it's doing a Rip Van Winkle

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that it's going to take a big gob of dynamite to jar it out of. Some day that will happen, and the decent element will be on top for a year or two. Then it will fall asleep at the switch and do another century, while the gang rings in again. Oh, it'll happen, for a little while, the reform stunt. It always does. But it won't last long, and then it's the gang that we have always with us. Boss rule? It's explained easily enough. Your decent element is troubled with trances; the gang's got insomnia."

"So you think Shaugnessy 'll get what's coming to him some day?" mused Dick. "Where's your dynamite?"

"Right here!" asserted O'Byrn, bracing in his chair and vigorously banging his desk. "Here or in some other good newspaper office in this town. Do you know the reason of Shaughnessy's success here? It's because he never shows his hand. He's a gilt-edged daisy, that fellow. If he had been doing his business in the open they'd have had him behind bars long ago. But he's doing his directing from the wings. You and I know that if we pick out a reputable man, hap-hazard, from the decent element we've been speaking of, and begin talking to him of Shaughnessy, he'll laugh and chase up the street, saying that the papers have Shaughnessy on the brain. It's a fact that a lot of people don't look on that Irish scoundrel as anything more than a cheap ward boss, with little influence in the city at large. There's reason enough for the view. The newspapers have poured out columns of abuse of Shaughnessy in the past few years, but sum it all up and it's composed wholly of vague generalities. They've never brought anything home to him that was worth the bringing, never a thing that would jug him for a minute. The average voter here holds him too cheap.

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That fact, coupled with the natural majority he controls, always tips his scales right. Tell your voter-at-large that it was Shaughnessy who engineered the queer, rotten deals that have figured in this town—yes, and the legislature,—deals whose parentage they can't trace, and the voter would give you the laugh."

"He'd have a right to," commented Kirk. "Go slow, Micky. Shaughnessy's a good organizer, and maybe he's put some cheap ones through, but he's limited."

"So is the flyer," retorted Micky, "but it'll jerk you along some. Don't you foolish yourself about that mick, Andy. He's a deep one. He's got a side to him that's working overtime. It's an underground system, and any lucky guy in this business that tumbles into it will see things that'll fill his paper next day with facts, not surmises, facts that'll set 'em all gapin'. That's the dynamite that'll explode some day and it'll blow Shaughnessy into stripes and behind the bars. Of course, there'll be a new boss after a while, but it won't be Shaughnessy."

The city editor summoned them just then and the conference was abruptly terminated. Soon afterward Micky and Dick descended together in the elevator and walked up the avenue toward the point where their paths separated. They were still talking of Shaughnessy.

"He's an odd genius," Dick was saying, "and I think you have sized him up about right. I've studied him more or less, and I gave him credit from the first of having a lot more under his hat than a good many think he has. He strikes me as a sort of a cross between a hyena and a bulldog. From his start here he's never let go—and there's the stench about him of a political charnel house. After he got his start, everything that would be likely to

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hamper him went by the board. You know he runs a wholesale liquor house. It used to be a little saloon when he first struck here, and they tell me he used to drink up most of his stock himself. Very secretive fellow, nobody knew anything about him. Then, all of a sudden, he got started on his career. Alderman at first, I believe, but wasn't in public life long, didn't need to be. He's a wonder. They tell me that from the time of his first canvass for office he cut out the booze and doesn't touch it at all. Wiped out his own handicap. Well, you see what he's done; he's well fixed. They all know it's there, but they can't prove where he got it. And say, speak of the devil—there he is now."

Shaughnessy passed them, with a slight nod of recognition to Glenwood. His face gleamed ghastly under the flood of electric light, there were blue shadows under his black eyes. While he walked briskly enough, his face, in addition to its usual lack of animation, held utter weariness.

"Looks bad, doesn't he?" remarked Dick, as they separated on the corner. "Something must be the matter with him. Looks to be all in."

"No," grinned Micky; "it just makes him thin every campaign figuring to keep his job." Then he added unsmilingly, "He makes me feel as tired as he looks, Dick. I don't know what it is, but there's something about that geezer that makes a fellow feel like crape on the knob."

A little later, seated in the library of his handsome residence on Morley Street, Colonel John Westlake heard his door bell ringing and was manifestly apprehensive. The closed oak desk in the corner, the sight of the Colonel stretched contentedly in his easy chair, a fragrant

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cigar between his lips and a favorite book in his hand, indicated a quiet, enjoyable evening which the gentleman regretted to have disturbed. So it was with suppressed irritation that the Colonel looked up, warned by the rustle of feminine skirts, to find the maid standing in the doorway.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said she. "He didn't give any card. He said to tell you that Mr. Shaughnessy wanted to see you a minute."

The Colonel's smile was grimly questioning, while he reflectively stroked his sandy beard, which was faintly streaked with gray. Then he cogitated for a moment, while he abandoned his whiskers for a small, round bald spot on his crown, which he thoughtfully rubbed. "Well," said he finally, "show him in, Mary."

Left to himself the Colonel took a couple of long thoughtful puffs at his cigar, while he chuckled audibly. The look of irritation had vanished; it had given place to one of piqued and peppery curiosity.

The look with which Colonel Westlake greeted his visitor, as the boss entered the library, was one of eager aggressiveness. The Colonel was a fighter and a gallant one; he itched for any fray that would allow him to glory in honorable combat, for it was always honorable on his side. His eyes were blue and stormy, but they always looked straight at you and the fire of awakened antagonism in them had often caused the dishonorable to quail. But at this particular moment, the black, sinister eyes of Shaughnessy, the unbidden, sullenly impassive as an Indian's, stared straight into the sharp, challenging ones of the Colonel without a sign of wavering, and the even, expressionless voice of Shaughnessy

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anticipated any words of dubious welcome the Colonel might have spoken.

"You need not ask regarding the occasion for the honor of my visit, Colonel," he said, as his host rose, "for I know well enough that you do not regard it as an honor." He smiled sardonically.

The Colonel smiled also, quite broadly. This was not so bad. "You are quite right, Mr. Shaughnessy," he acknowledged. "I know you well enough to know that you're here on business. Well, take a chair and state it." There was an underlying something in the Colonel's tone, a peremptory note that spelled, "Be brief as possible and get out."

It failed to disturb the nonchalance of Shaughnessy. He leisurely seated himself in a chair opposite that of the Colonel, the large oak table being between them. Then, with half-closed eyes dreamily searching the ceiling, he proceeded to apparently forget his host's presence in a sudden fit of abstraction which was, under the circumstances, superb.

The Colonel waited a moment, his choler rising perceptibly. "Well, sir?" he finally queried, and there was menace in his tone.

Shaughnessy lazily lowered his eyes till they rested level with those of his host. The Colonel thought instinctively, as he gazed into them, of the fixed beady stare of a serpent.

"You are at present the principal owner of the Courier, having purchased the controlling interest early the past summer, aren't you, Colonel?" asked Shaughnessy.

"Most certainly. What of it?"

"You are not at present in favor of taking a contract

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for any or all of the official city printing?" pursued Shaughnessy.

"What do you mean?" demanded the Colonel, his gorge rising. "You have had my answer—"

"Wait a moment," interrupted the boss, raising a deprecating thin hand. "Let's get at this logically. Keep cool, Colonel. And now, another thing. Do I understand that you intend to pound what you are pleased to call my machine during the present campaign?"

The Colonel's eyes lighted up with the battle fire, but his voice was mellow with an ominous softness as he answered, "Pound you? As hard as God will let me, my dear sir. Yes, you bet your life!"

"Well, now, let's see about that," pursued Shaughnessy, his voice as soft and menacing as the other's. "I'm told by a friend of mine, Colonel, that you're a heavy holder of this Consolidated Gas that is arousing so much speculation just now." His voice had grown insolent. His face remained impassive, but his eyes, beginning to burn with evil exultation, searched the Colonel's own.

For his part, the host leaned forward, his elbows on the table, and stared straight across at Shaughnessy. "Well," he inquired, still softly, "what if I am, eh?"

"Well, if you are," retorted Shaughnessy, also leaning forward, his lips set cruelly under his small black moustache, "if you are—not to please me, for I'm getting out of the small share I've had in local politics, but for your own good—don't you think you'd better reconsider that city printing matter?"

"And if I should," suggested the Colonel, his tone even quieter, "why, you'd expect the Courier—of course—"

Shaughnessy leaned back with a cynical, assured smile.

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His tone was now arrogant. "The Courier," he sneered, "why, of course, the Courier will get in line."

Colonel Westlake looked away for a moment. "Yes, the Courier will get in line," he murmured. He slowly removed his still lighted cigar from his mouth and placed it carefully on the corner of the table. Shaughnessy silently exulted with evil eyes, which then again indifferently, dreamily, sought the ceiling.

"The Courier will get in line!" There was a difference in the tone, a ringing note which in a flash recalled Shaughnessy's wandering gaze. He found the Colonel standing opposite him, his hands grasping the edge of the table, his face crimson with rage. "You hound!" growled the Colonel, "you crawling snake! I've drawn you out; I only wish it was far enough for me to get my heel on you. But I'll do it yet. The Courier will get in line, you leper, don't you doubt it, but it will be to crush you and your dirty brood, for the forces of decency are going to stamp you out this November as sure as there's a God in heaven! We've got to dig to do it, thanks to your devilish ingenuity, but it'll be done. The Citizens' Fusion ticket, with an honest man at the head, is going through, and your ward heeler list will be wiped out at the polls, mark me. We're going to clean this cesspool, but we'll drown you in it first! And now let me tell you just how much of a cursed fool you made of yourself just now in trying to intimidate me. Your solicitous friend didn't pry long enough, it seems. I was the holder of a big block of Consolidated Gas for just three days, solely through the blunder of an agent. It's an infamous thing, which nobody should know better than yourself, and if your sneaking lieutenant

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had been worth his salt, he'd have found that I haven't had a dollar in that highway robbery combine for four months; that I was not personally responsible for being in it in the first place, and that I was at pains to get out of it at the expense of a personal loss the moment I learned of it. Moreover, I suspect that it was a cunning plan made months ago to compromise me in the belief that the love of revenue would keep me in it and allow interests of which you well know, you scoundrel, to get control of me. It's worked with others, but I'm not built that way. You've showed your hand for nothing, and if your heeler had been possessed of a penny's worth of brains, he'd have found out about things and saved you unnecessary trouble. Let me assure you that the Courier will put in double time to smash you, Shaughnessy, and now I will ask you to leave before you are put out."

The Colonel ceased, his hands trembling with rage, his blazing eyes fixed on Shaughnessy, who had sat with averted face and without a word during Westlake's fiery denunciation. Now he rose, ever so leisurely, and turned slowly, facing the owner of the Courier. The white face was unruffled by any trace of emotion, the black, sinister eyes stared unwaveringly as a reptile's into the Colonel's fiery blue ones. Shaughnessy fumbled in an upper pocket of his vest.

"Pardon, Colonel, have you a match?" he inquired. His voice had all the serenity of a mild June day. The dazed Westlake mechanically produced one. Shaughnessy lazily lighted a cigar and sauntered out.

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CHAPTER IX

NOT ON THE PROGRAMME

IN a few days occurred the Citizens' convention. A formidable array of men was there; business and professional men, leaders in the city's activities. It was an array which might well set the forces that controlled the city government to worrying. Moreover, real enthusiasm ruled the assemblage, and when Colonel Westlake, in a fiery nominating speech, named Theodore Packard, one of the city's leading merchants, for the mayoralty, thunderous demonstrations attested the temper of the delegates.

Under the aggressive leadership of Colonel Westlake, the Fusionists had taken time by the forelock and were first in the field with a strong ticket. Warm hopes were entertained for it this year. Republicans, who were greatly in the minority in the city, had taken the initiative in starting the Fusion movement, which was strengthened by the open avowal of some of the community's best known men, of Democratic allegiance, that they were done with Shaughnessy and his methods. The movement appeared to be gaining in force and bulk, like a snowball rolling down hill, as the hour approached for the Democratic convention, toward which all eyes were now turning.

There were indications that the entrenched, corrupt

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forces which dominated the city were getting ready to invite their own destruction. Was it not Shaughnessy who held the whip hand, and was not Shaughnessy going crazy? Verily, it seemed so, and Shaughnessy, apparently drunk with the power invested in his acquired authority, seemed likely to exercise it to his own destruction. "The man is mad," remarked the leaders of the Citizens' movement, one to the other, and rubbed their hands. For Shaughnessy's candidate for the nomination, the man for whom, as he calmly stated, the convention would, at his word, vote as one man, was so notoriously inadequate, so miserably unfit, that the prospect of his nomination set a resentful growl to circulating even among many of the chosen delegates to the Democratic, otherwise the Shaughnessy, convention. Dare Shaughnessy, so cocksure of his evil hold upon the city, thrust such a candidate upon his party? Certain of Shaughnessy's supporters grumbled, while the leaders of the Citizens' movement ground their teeth and figuratively removed their coats.

True to his promise to Shaughnessy, on the occasion of that worthy's call upon the owner of the Courier, Colonel Westlake's paper was firing hot shot at the local boss. The effrontery and callous indifference to all considerations, save his own sweet will, which Shaughnessy was displaying in his choice of a candidate for the mayoralty, was dished up daily, in attractive and toothsome guise, for the Courier's readers. Westlake was certainly pounding Shaughnessy.

Meanwhile, strange whispers began circulating around the town, things that savored of disloyalty to Shaughnessy. The unpopularity of the candidate, whose for-

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tunes he had espoused, was evidently breeding a revolt among Shaughnessy's followers, of which he seemed strangely oblivious. At all events, he was wholly indifferent to it. To add seriousness to the situation, some of the boss' most trusted lieutenants had been heard to utter words that sounded strangely from the lips of faithful followers. These little seeds of dissension were sown cautiously, but they fell where they seemed sure to bring forth the fruit of contention. When ex-Alderman Goldberg, supposed to be retired from politics, the lanky Dick Peterson, and the moon-faced Willie Shute, men known to have been for years identified with Shaughnessy's interests, began treacherously knifing him, the Fusionists pricked up their ears and polished their eyeglasses. Might there not be a disastrous factional Democratic fight?

The day before the convention occurred there was a tense, growing expectancy through the city, a vague, intangible premonition of an unguessed something on the morrow. What is was to be nobody knew, but that there was a rift in the Shaughnessy lute,—or "loot," as one Fusionist wag expressed it,—was now plainly apparent to all parties. The existence of a plot against him was recognized, yet Shaughnessy made no sign. His insolent programme was known; he proposed on the morrow to thrust his preposterously unfit candidate for the mayoralty, together with a few other objectionable nominees for divers offices, down the throat of the convention. The programme of the opposition was not known, but Goldberg, Peterson and Shute, with others whose fidelity to the interests of the boss had hitherto been unquestioned, had been busy. They had toward

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the end thrown off the pretense of secrecy and had declared the boss' programme to be suicidal to the chances of Democratic success. The array of malcontents grew larger and more formidable. It was increased by the well circulated report that Goldberg had tried to remonstrate with the boss and been freezingly turned down.

"The delegates won't stand for it, Shaughnessy," Goldberg had said. "It's out of all reason."

The sneer in Shaughnessy's reply had inflamed an army of hitherto faithful adherents against him. "The delegates will do as I dictate," he had said. "This convention, let me tell you, will name my ticket, and the kickers will be kicked out of the party."

Surely Shaughnessy was going mad. "I understand he said lately that he didn't intend to figure in local politics much longer," said Colonel Westlake one day to the Fusionist candidate for the mayorality, Theodore Packard, though without apprising him of the circumstances under which the boss made that statement. "Well, do you know, I begin to believe this dissension in their ranks has been brewing for some time. 'When thieves fall out,' you know. I think he foresaw this scrap and is risking the issue on a last desperate game, which he is growing rather afraid of losing."

"Yes, but why is he espousing such a notorious ticket?" inquired Packard. "It seems to me that he is beaten in advance, with a handicap like that, and ought to have sense enough to know it."

"He probably had his programme laid out months ago," replied the Colonel, "when he felt more secure than he does now. His opponents are cunning. They played

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foxy Judas till the last moment, and then they began to knife him. It's a slick game. He can't back down now, he's got to stand by his guns. To knuckle would be a confession of weakness, and that would be fatal. It looks to me as if he had a Waterloo coming in his own camp. They've got something up their sleeve, depend upon it. I wish I knew what it was."

Decidedly, the ordinary expressionless face of Shaughnessy, could he have heard this conversation, would have been worth seeing.

The momentous autumn day, peaceful and delightful, was in strong contrast to the turbulent scene within the hall, just before the Democratic convention was called to order. The galleries were packed with a nervous crowd, ripe for anticipated excitement. That something big, not on the card, was about to happen, everyone was confident. And once and again the eyes of the massed, fitful throng of spectators searched out Shaughnessy, standing unobtrusively in a corner of the great hall, always surrounded by excited, gesticulating delegates. Shaughnessy was evidently saying little and his dead black eyes and ghastly face expressed less. Yet the thousands of eyes turned hungrily to him again and again, for the impression had gone forth that in some way the mute, mysterious boss was to be offered as a sacrifice, to the ends of treacherous associates, on the altar of his own unscrupulous ambition.

Micky O'Byrn, of the Courier, detailed to do the descriptive touches of the convention, viewed Shaughnessy curiously from his position at the rear of the hall. "He looks like his own funeral," thought Micky, "but then, that's chronic with him." His gaze wandered interest-

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edly over the mass of excited delegates swarming about the floor; his ears sought instinctively to gather something definite from the swelling babel of speech. Suddenly a low-toned voice sounded at his elbow in a communication evidently intended for a single ear, and that not Micky's. O'Byrn's rapid sidelong glance verified his supposition. It was Goldberg, speaking softly to a delegate.

"Tom Grady, he'll do the trick," said Goldberg, and the two moved away. Micky whistled softly. "Good move!" he remarked quietly to himself. "He'll take 'em by storm." For it was evident that it was Tom Grady, the city's youngest and most fiery Democratic orator, who was to nominate the opponent to Shaughnessy's man. But who was this opponent? Micky wrinkled his brows, and, like the crowd in the galleries and many of the delegates themselves, fell to speculating, for the extraordinary thing about the situation was that while everybody was sure an opponent would be produced, nobody knew who he would be.

But now the convention was rapped to order, and delegates and audience alike fell into uneasy silence. The roll was called, the credentials were handed in, and in due time the temporary chairman retired in favor of the permanent incumbent. His selection had been railroaded through before it dawned upon the gathering that he was one of Shaughnessy's strongest adherents. So the boss had scored one. Dave Mulhill could be relied upon to look after him.

With the chair's call for nominations the excitement increased. It had rather been expected that, at this critical point of his political fortunes, Shaughnessy would

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decide to speak for himself, though he had never done so. He did not, however, and his man, Dennis Burns, was placed in nomination by Charles Heferman, a young lawyer who had of late dulled a formerly bright reputation by known dealings with the gang that ruled the city. Heferman's effort was able, though no enthusiasm was evident. No one could have grown enthusiastic over Shaughnessy's candidate.

Heferman finished and sat down, amid a ripple of perfunctory applause that boded ill for the boss' prospects. At that moment Micky O'Byrn chanced to be looking across the hall straight at Shaughnessy. The sinister face was unmoved, but the black eyes, momentarily alight with unwonted fire, were fixed intently at a point about midway of the hall. In that instant Micky's keen vision beheld something that acted upon his intelligence like a galvanic battery, swiftly launching his wits upon previously unguessed channels of absorbing and profitable speculation.

"Next in order, nominations of President of the Council," announced Dave Mulhill from the chair, even before the faint applause which had greeted Heferman's speech had died away. The chairman's words produced an angry hubbub, and his evident reluctance to recognize a gentleman who was on his feet, demanding attention, had the effect of fanning the latent antagonism against the machine to a brighter blaze. Not until sundry groans and cries of "Gag!" and "Fair play!" were heard did Chairman Mulhill deign to recognize Hon. Thomas Grady, now known to all as the spokesman of the opposition.

Intense silence prevailed as Mr. Grady, recognized

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already as one of the leaders of the legislature, was reluctantly accorded the privilege of the floor. A silver tongue he had indeed, and a voice like the mellow, dulcet notes of an organ. Over six feet in height and with the bulk and carriage of a Viking, his handsome face flushed and his blue eyes alight with battle, he was a figure to command admiration. Added to these a splendid gift of oratory, the whole produced a combination of magnetic charm which they used to say was fairly hypnotizing to an audience.

The howl of delight with which the assemblage received the ironical acknowledgment of the speaker to the chairman, for the privilege of the floor, indicated its temper toward Shaughnessy. The words of the orator flowed on, gathering fire as he warmed to the subject of the hopes and prospects of the city Democracy. He warned them that it was a critical moment, that the Fusionists had nominated a strong ticket. "It is one that we must reckon with," he declared. "You and I, secure in the knowledge of the good our party has done our beloved municipality, will utterly disclaim the necessity for this absurdly mistaken movement on the part of our friends, the visionary enemy. But even if that enemy be composed of so many wild-eyed Don Quixotes, mounted on their hobbies and fighting windmills, yet, friends, the issue, however ridiculous, is here." He turned and looked straight at Shaughnessy. "Gentlemen, it is as yet unmet. This is not a moment for any false and perhaps fatal step. We owe it to ourselves to meet the enemy with a front that shall be utterly unassailable to his assaults."

Pausing imperturbably till the resultant applause had

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died away, the orator proceeded, in glowing periods, to discourse of the sovereignty of the people, of their right to choose their leaders, of the moment which had now arrived to reaffirm their convictions and pursue the highest of party ideals. While the address continued some clever, covert digs at Shaughnessy, the speaker, after the manner of his suave tribe, avoided the quagmires of ugly suspicions and half-guessed corruption that had characterized his party's administration of affairs during recent years. With consummate tact he rather confined himself to broad generalities that fired the blood of his auditors and did not remind them of things that would chill enthusiasm. Mr. Grady urged them only to take the right step in time, to meet strength with strength,—this with another challenging look at Shaughnessy,—to enter the battle equipped for victory rather than defeat.

Now he was approaching the end of his discourse and had not named his candidate. They had hung upon every word, had drunk in the golden sentences that thrilled, that satisfied, yet did not reveal the name of the mysterious champion whose candidacy the orator was advocating. As he swung into his peroration, the piqued curiosity of the people had become almost pain. They were ripe for a shrieking chaos of enthusiasm, and he knew it. So, with gathered forces, with flashing eyes and voice that rang like a trumpet, he figuratively fired the powder train.

"And now," he cried, "you are awaiting the announcement of the man whose name among men is one to conjure with; the man, strong, able and of good repute, the man who is no man's man—" with a defiant gesture

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toward Shaughnessy that awakened tremendous enthusiasm,—"the man whose nomination here today means victory. Gentlemen, it is with pleasure that I nominate for the mayoralty of this city a man known to you all for years, for years the trusted, honored servant of our people; a man of achievement, of renown, of probity, of independence, of superb ability; a man who, under God, will rule for righteousness' sake and wear no man's collar; in a word, that distinguished jurist and gentleman, Judge Rufus Atwell Boynton!"

A roar like many waters followed, a roar like thunderous, storm-driven breakers upon a lonely beach, a roar of exultation. Lulling for a moment, the deafening din broke out afresh, again and again, as if it would never cease. Men cheered till they could no longer cheer, but squawked like chickens; standing with empurpled faces, brandishing their arms, cackling strangely, with ludicrous effort and with distended, bloodshot eyes. The gavel fell in vain; only a cannonade could have been heard in that babel of sound. As soon as the noise abated, through sheer force of physical exhaustion, a vote was railroaded through, the hostile chairman being helpless before the fierce faces and voices of this mob, for such it had become under the electrifying lash of Grady's words. Judge Boynton was nominated by an overwhelming majority, even drawing from the forces pledged to the fortunes of the Shaughnessy candidate. The tumult broke out again.

It was suddenly stilled. O'Byrn, from his chair near the rear, saw a thin white hand raised deprecatingly, marked a sardonic white face and inscrutable eyes, whose owner silently demanded attention. It was yielded

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with a promptness that was uncanny. Then Shaughnessy, erect in the midst of his ward delegation, spoke. His thin voice with a cold, underlying sneer, cut the air like a knife, penetrating to every corner of the hall.

"The majority rules," said Shaughnessy. "It is customary, in similar case, to move a unanimous nomination. I so move." The deposed boss sat down. The resultant applause was rather faint. Shaughnessy had somehow chilled the enthusiasm.

To Micky O'Byrn, sitting with knitted brows as the other nominations, involving a complete demolition of the Shaughnessy ticket, were hurried through, there was food for much serious thought and conjecturing. He noted the new candidate as he was brought before the convention and introduced, amid great enthusiasm, by Hon. Thomas Grady. He was older than Micky had imagined and he seemed wearied, almost ill. Still, reflected O'Byrn,—as he listened to the candidate's short speech of appreciation and of assurances for the future, in the event of election,—it seemed strange that the Judge should not display more enthusiasm over an honor which had come to him so signally. Then he fell again to pondering, striving to put two and two together.

That the outcome seriously threatened the Fusionist movement was undeniable. In fact, that ticket was as good as defeated already, for it was robbed of an issue. Judge Boynton was a strong candidate, every whit as strong as Theodore Packard and in similar ways. Incredible as it might seem, Shaughnessy had been humiliated, practically kicked out by his party. But how had it happened? Micky frowned. "There's a nigger

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somewhere," he reflected, "if the coon could only be found."

At the close of the convention Micky was walking thoughtfully down the street toward the office. It was then dusk and the lamps were being lighted. Someone joined Micky and quietly fell into pace with him. O'Byrn glanced up. It was Slade.

"Funny thing that, over at the convention," remarked Micky. "I should have thought Shaughnessy was solid."

"Yes," answered Slade, placidly. "I should have naturally thought he was."

"Were you there?"

"You bet."

"Then tell me whether Shaughnessy gave Tom Grady the wink to spiel this afternoon," pursued Micky, "or is it my eyes?"

Slade looked at him keenly, then laughed quietly. "I'm sayin' nothing—yet," said he, "but your eyes seem O. K. to me."

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CHAPTR X

THE LITTLE RED DEVIL

HARKINS looked up from his loaded desk, glancing at the clock. It was after ten. The city editor frowned heavily and called to Fatty, who was just passing him on his way out.

"Stearns," he inquired, "have you seen O'Byrn? He has not reported, nor did he ask off for this evening."

"Perhaps he's sick, sir," nervously volunteered Fatty, who knew better but did not intend to give his co-worker away. "Seems to me he looked kind o' peaked yesterday."

"He could easily have sent word," doubtfully rejoined Harkins. "However, you might inquire and let me know. Or, if you see him, send him in here," and he turned to his desk.

Fatty went out. "Send him in here!" he chuckled grimly. "If he's stayed with that bunch he was with at six o'clock, Harkins would pass him on to the gold cure."

All the staff, save Harkins, knew it by this time. Micky, after a season of well doing that was protracted for him, had broken out again in one of his periodical sprees. It was not of the innocuous variety of indulgence that affords satiety in a single evening, leaving the victim remorseful and fortified against another lapse

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for an indefinite time. Of such are the fortunate, who are immune from the wiles of a sleepless, diabolical appetite. With Micky it was different. To resist a craving which never really slumbered meant real effort and unceasing vigilance. To succumb meant usually an unrecking debauch of days, while the little red devil worked its sweet will with him, to finally leave him spent and shaken, a temporary sodden wreck. This was the grim enemy, coupled with an unreasoning love of roving, that had made him, rarely talented as he was, a shifting vagrant of the news. It had landed him, ragged and unkempt, at the door of the Courier office. Now it bade fair to cast him forth again, shipwrecked at this most prosperous point of his fortunes, to try once more a dreary, uncertain future, with the gibing ghosts of lost opportunities ever at his elbow; with the maddening memory of a forfeited love, the truest he would ever know, mocking him.

Fatty did not inquire for Micky at his lodgings, nor did he attempt to find him and give him Harkins' message. He omitted the first because he was well aware that Micky would not be found there for some time, the second because he did not care to meet O'Byrn and his crew, for fear that he would be drawn into the maelstrom. He knew Micky's insistence and Fatty was cautious. Thirdly, he felt assured that Harkins would be advised of the cause of Micky's absence in due time, and Stearns had no desire to figure as a bird of ill omen. So he went about his tasks and discreetly dodged places that might perchance hold the uproarious O'Byrn and his riotous cronies.

Fortune was against Stearns, however, for it led

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him, in quest of an elusive item, into the rotunda of the Palace hotel. He met his man there, hastily secured his story, and started out. The entrance to the wine room was at one side. There was the sound of revelry within.

As Stearns was about to pass out, the swinging doors of the wine room were flung open and there appeared, flushed and disheveled, the riotous O'Byrn. At sight of Fatty, who gasped and made a wild bolt to escape, Micky emitted a whoop of triumph and swooped down upon him. He captured him handily and despite his desperate struggles propelled him in headlong fashion into the wine room, for the Irishman was as wiry as he was slender. Stearns found himself in the center of a bibulous throng which included newspaper men, speedy young sports and a few odd bits of *débris,* picked up on the rising flood. They crowded about Fatty, some clamoring for introductions, some making facetious comment on the manner of his entrance, still others rendering him tribute in dubious song. For a moment the din was indescribable, while the "chemist" made ineffectual appeals for order. Then Micky managed to make himself heard above the babel in a demand for quiet.

"Fatness," said he, with a wave of his hand, "these are the Indians. Indians, this are Fatty. Fatty, the Indians are drunk. Indians, Fatty ain't drunk now but he must be made so. Does it go?" A chorus of affirmative yells made answer.

"Now, Fatty," continued O'Byrn earnestly, "in meeting this little wish of ours for your subsequent comfort, be a gentleman. Don't show a grasping spirit, like the two meanest men on record. Never heard of 'em? Well,

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one of 'em was asked by a friend to have a drink. Asked what he'd take he waited till the buyer had ordered a whisky and then says, 'Gimme two beers,' so as to get his ten cents' worth. Other one of 'em was worse 'n that. Friend asked him what he'd have, an' says he, 'If you don't mind, I'd rather have the money.' No, Indians, Fatty ain't like that. Ask him what he'll have, and the modesty of his demands would put those graspin' dubs to shame."

"Gee, Micky," gurgled Stearns, trying to squirm away, "I ain't got time, honest I ain't. I've got an assignment."

The crowd closed in, holding him securely. Micky mused with corrugated brow. Thus far the only evidences of his indulgence were an unusual sparkle of the eye, a crimsoned countenance and a bewildering flow of language.

"'Assignment,'" cogitated Micky, "what does that mean? Where have I heard that word? Let me forget before I remember already. Let us drink to forget. Vat iss, Fatty?"

Fatty gulped despairingly. There was no hope. "Birch beer," he murmured resignedly. There sounded a universal groan.

"Birch beer!" echoed O'Byrn, in a positive squeal. "I wonder if the mixer hasn't got some Mellin's food? Siphon some milk into him; do, the sweet thing! No, I'll tell you what you'll drink, Fatty. It'll be a Mamie Taylor, with me!"

There was unanimous approval registered in a strident roar. Despite Stearns' protest the "chemist" was urged to mix him a Mamie, Fatty finally becoming silenced

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in meek submission. Resolving to "shake the bunch" at the first favorable moment, he gazed doubtfully at the seductive mixture in his glass. Micky held up his Mamie and soliloquized.

"This Mamie is a jade," he remarked, with an air of finality that effectually settled the matter. "She's that smooth and insinuating, so agreeable, that it seems as if you could drink her all night, so you generally do. Plain whisky's more honest. It's got that old, shivery yah-yah taste to it that keeps warnin' you all the time to side-track, so you're apt to do it before you get telescoped by the D T's. But these blamed fancy flips are what play the devil with a fellow. They're come-ons, clear from champagne to ginger ale splits. They taste so pretty that the next is a necessity, and after that, in the pleasant salve to the palate, you lose count. Take Mamie here. She's the worst in the push. You can gauge your capacity in any other line except on her. She figures her own capacity and the figures always lie, as you realize next morning. Much is a sufficiency, always. More is a superfluperosity.

"In this connection, Mamie reminds me of a story of an old man up north who had slipped from grace for some years and never thought any more of the religious teachings of childhood till trouble switched in, though that's common enough. But along came a famine time and everyone was livin' on short commons. The old man was urged to make a family prayer for some of the necessities. He wasn't used to it and shied considerable, but it was need that egged him on. Well, he got started O. K. with 'O Lord, send us a bar'l o' pork. Send us a bar'l o' sugar. Send us a bar'l o'—o'—pep-

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per—Oh, hell! that's too much pepper!' was the way he rang off.

"Now that's what I'll be sayin' about Mamie, too much of her, when I come to, but such is her infernal fascination that—" He broke off with a wild clutch at Fatty's receding coat tail. Stearns had seized the favorable moment to escape. He got out before Micky could catch him. As O'Byrn was about to shoot through the door in pursuit of him, it swung inward and a familiar figure confronted the little Irishman.

"Well, Micky," remarked Dick dryly, "don't you think you've had enough? Better come along."

For answer O'Byrn tried to drag Dick to the bar. "Come on, old man," he shouted. "Get in! There's Mamies to burn."

Dick had heard of his co-worker's outbreak and hurried from the office in quest of him, chancing to learn where he was. Micky had talked with him previously, regarding his weakness, and Dick knew what its uninterrupted continuance would mean.

"Come home, Micky," he urged, "before you get maudlin. Bunk in and get a good night's rest and you'll be all right for work tomorrow." He led Micky insistently out of the wine room, unmindful of the protests of O'Byrn's companions. They passed through the office to the street.

Micky had been quiet for a moment but now his libations reasserted their influence. He struggled with Dick, voicing sundry curses.

"What d' ye mean?" he demanded. "Let me go, I'm going back. Mind your own business, can't you?"

"Shut up!" growled Dick fiercely. "Can't you see

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people are looking at us? Close your face and come along like a gentleman, for, I tell you, you're going home!"

Then something happened. Before Micky's haggard eyes appeared mistily, taking swift and tangible substance, a girl's face, young and lovely, just now convulsed with horror. Then it was gone, leaving a leaden weight in Micky's breast, while the vapors rose sluggishly from his benumbed brain. Reason, shrinking and ashamed, looked out from his hot eyes. He braced defiantly though hopelessly.

"It's all right, Dick, I'll go home," he said in a strange low tone and they walked in silence down the street.

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CHAPTER XI

IN THE MORNING

MICKY awoke late that morning with a persistent, painful throbbing in his head, fevered eyes and a parched throat. The symptoms held an arid familiarity which was swiftly allied with self contempt, as sleep yielded full place to awakened consciousness. For O'Byrn would never be calloused. As he once expressed it, his career was best epitomized in Ade's graphic epigram, "Life is a series of relapses and recoveries." The inherent manliness would always wage war against the little red devil that sought malevolently to wither it. It would be a pitifully checkered fight, but whatever the issue,—even should the world, which never understands, write him down a wreck at the end,—a few who knew him best, and understood, would know that Micky tried. Who will question, in a world where so many drift, that in the simple will to try lies victory?

Micky lay quiet for some moments after awaking, palms pressed to his burning temples, swollen eyes gazing sombrely up at the ceiling of his small, plainly furnished room. The hot sun poured in at the window, before which the shade had not been drawn. The boy, for he was scarcely more, wandered in dreary retrospect through a world of gray memories. How gray, how

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bleak, to be sure! At the very outset the recollection of a childhood saddened by the frequent sight of a woman in tears; a woman with a pale, worn face and eyes that held the inexpressible pathos of a forlorn hope deferred, his mother. His father, did the world still hold him? O'Byrn told himself fiercely that it could not be, that earth must long since wearied of such an excresence and cast it forth to annihilation.

To the woman with the pale, worn face and tired eyes, the woman who was now at rest, he owed his upbringing. From the time that he could not remember, when she and her baby were deserted by the husband and father, till the hour when she lay wasted in her final illness, she had toiled for the boy, to give him clothes, sustenance, schooling. Micky remembered with a dull ache at his heart how in the supreme hour the poor tired eyes had watched in vain for one who came not, how the wan lips had in delirium whispered a dishonored name. Then the end, and the ensuing picture of a little newsvender, led sobbing from the new-filled grave of the truest friend he would ever know.

And this other, the being who had left a frail weakling to bear the brunt alone, for what must the son thank him? For the inherited fiend's appetite that marred him, no more. The son well knew that the craving was the intensified replica of the father's crowning vice. He had learned, moreover, that the parent had deemed it a witty thing to ply the son with toddy while in his cradle. The son took to it with an avidity of grave presage, but which delighted the tippling parent. This was the heritage from his father, a heritage that held in fee wastes of black bog and hungry mire, with death squat-

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ting grimly in the midst. Ah, what a goodly patrimony he had left, this absent one; what wealth indeed!

The boy in the bed winced as beneath the impact of a blow. He struck clenched hands together fiercely. "Oh, God!" he breathed, the tone combining the bitter venom of a curse with the agonized entreaty of a prayer.

A moment more he lay in silence, vague eyes fixed on a gray and resurrected past. He stirred uneasily. "Ah, well, this won't do!" he muttered, and flinging off the coverings he rolled off upon the floor. The sunlight dazzled his eyes and he blinked like a bat as he drew the shade. He swayed unsteadily for a moment, wincing as a sharp pain stabbed his throbbing head, dying in needle-like prickings just behind the eyes. With a discouraged groan he made his way to the wash stand, and emptying the pitcher into the bowl, plunged his fevered head into the refreshing contents and held it there. It was very pleasant, the coolness, and a brisk rubbing with a crash towel added decidedly to the relief. Dressing with shaking fingers, he was finally ready and left the house, blinking swollen eyes owlishly in the clear sunlight. He stopped at a restaurant just long enough to swallow a cupful of black coffee in order to neutralize a bevy of differing tastes that tenanted his mouth, vying in stale mustiness. Again he sought the open air, wandering aimlessly.

Clearly the coffee was not enough, for his head throbbed worse than before. Involuntarily he steadied it with one hand, to keep it on, while he put into Kelly's drug store for a bromo. Kelly's was popular with the boys. It was open nights and they could buy whisky in the back room, after all the other places were closed, and

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secure bromo over the soda water fountain in the morning.

Micky absorbed his bromo in a gloomy, introspective mood. The bracer, as it is generally understood, he was minded this morning to avoid as if it had been a pestilence. He was wont to say that a bracer was to him but a limited stop-over, that he would be sure to be traveling again before noon. He had travelled far enough this trip, far enough to menace a future, which had never seemed so bright. Disquieting recollections gnawed at Micky's mind. A girl's face, eloquent with horror and disgust, seen as through a mist in the lighted street, confronted his shamed, wakened consciousness, while he writhed inwardly. And, too, his post with the Courier? Had he lost it? How much latitude would they extend to drunkards?

A drunkard! He shuddered at the repellent thought, yet what else was he? What else any man who allowed the infernal appetite to lure him from duty to be performed? Not once but many times had he, O'Byrn, fallen by this standard. Repeatedly had he been cast off, with the goal of reputation and success in sight, because of the little red devil, who journeyed with him the broad land over, making its hateful presence known at riotous intervals that resulted in swift changes and shifts of scene for the little Irishman. If, indeed, he had not lost his post with the Courier, it was due to the fortunate interruption of a spree that might otherwise have lasted a week. O'Byrn's soul went out in gratitude to Dick. Even though it should prove that he had lost both his place and his lady, it was a melancholy pleasure to Micky to have sobered so soon. He

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thought with deep self-disgust of prior orgies; of wild days and wilder nights, piling deliriously upon each other while sleep was unknown, a stranger to be banished; when all things loomed distorted, unreal, through a red haze. So it would go until, with abused nature exhausted, he would sink into a sodden stupor. From this he would finally emerge a shaking wreck, with the blackest of memories and usually with the blankest of futures, for his job usually went with his spree. The latter was always of inconvenient length for the demands of a newspaper office.

Something of these horrors he had communicated to Dick some time before. "This thing has played the devil with me, Dick," he had said. "I want excitement. Drinking is a means to the end. Then, first I know, it's an end to my means. That and my infernal itch for shifting have made me a scoffing and a byword. If I could get chained down, and lost my thirst, I might make good. I've come near it a lot of times and then the cussed coupling would break and I'd go slidin' down the grade again. Then it would be the bumpers out. I guess it'll be that way till I'm backed onto the siding for good. But I'm headed right now, and, if you ever catch me toyin' with the lush, I want you to joyously jack my jeans clear to my lodgings. Knock me down, pick me up and knock me down again."

"That's all very well, Micky," Dick had replied with a remonstrating bellow of a laugh, "but I'm not enough of a pharisee for that, you know, for I'm no total abstainer myself."

"Yes, but you're about two-thirds of a one," replied the other. "You don't know what an appetite means.

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You drink, when you drink at all, for good fellowship, because someone asks you to. Left to yourself, you'd never think of it. If you ever take too much, it means you're on the water wagon for a number of months, because you dread the feeling of the morning after. You're one of those lucky devils that can monkey with the stuff for a lifetime and never acquire the faintest vestige of a thirst. Now as for me, I can't coquette with it. I have to walk sideways past a saloon with my face turned the other way, across the street to the undertaker's. I've simply got to let it alone. Why? Because a lot of hard jolts have taught me that it's a lot stronger than I am unless it's held down with both hands. Sometimes I can take a glass and let it alone, but oftener the first glass is only a drop in the bucket that starts a demand to annex the whole well. Then there's a roaring Rip Van Winkle that I come out of a week or two later to find my job miles behind and me countin' ties and waitin' for a freight. That's the worst of it, Dick," with a red flush of shame. "It's thinkin' that you're just as liable to fall asleep at the switch, when you're on duty. Now that's what I'm carrying over the country with me. That's what I'm fightin'. First one on top, then the other. But whichever way, Dick, it's hell!"

There had ensued a silence, broken by Dick's voice, unwontedly sober.

"The gold cure, Micky, did you ever try it?"

"No!" with vigor, "and I never will! If I can't stand I'll go down, but it'll be alone. If I can't weather it without that, why then me to the dip-house, that's all. No artificial vacations in mine!"

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Which, if perhaps wrong-headed, at least bespoke a plenitude of grit.

Dick had remembered Micky's request to deliver him, if need be, from the fascinations of the grape, and had complied with it in spirit, if not in letter, the night previous. O'Byrn had been firmly torn from the bibulous bevy with which he had started that afternoon and been escorted home. And though the prospect was dismal enough to the boy who stood, hands in pockets, on the curb, staring moodily at the asphalt, he was glad that Dick had looked him up. It might have been worse.

How bad was it, anyway? Micky drew a long breath, squared his shoulders and started for the office.

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CHAPTER XII

WHY SHE CRIED

MICKY was not dismissed, though the city editor had a heart to heart talk with him. "We are not exactly sticklers for total abstinence here, O'Byrn," he said. "I am free to confess that I am ineligible to membership in the I. O. G. T. myself. But one thing the Courier does insist upon, which is that a man's indulgence must not be allowed to interfere with his work. I had important assignments for you last night and had to place them in other hands. Besides, we were short of men. When I accidentally learned, near press-time, of the real reason for your non-appearance, I was minded to let you go. But from what I learn I gather that it is something of a disease in your case. Cure yourself, my boy, for you're a good man and I've decided to give you another chance."

Micky stood quietly, his freckled face a queer study of mingled relief and misery. "It's more than I deserve, Mr. Harkins," he replied. "I'm a pup when I start drinkin'. You're right, it's a disease with me. I won't promise that it's a final attack, for I don't know, but I will promise," with meaning, "that you'll never have to jack me up for it again. If I can't hold on, why I'll quietly let go." He walked out.

Micky worked feverishly for a couple of days after

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that, his heart full of misgiving. His place was assured, true enough, but there was another matter, even more vital, which was rife with uncertainty. A girl's face, eloquent of horror and dismay, swam mistily before his eyes, as in the lighted street in front of the hotel when he was struggling with Glenwood. He closed his eyes with a shiver, but still saw the face, known for whose it was. Would she ever receive him, even nod to him again? Never, probably, and why should she? This was a new attitude for the ordinarily rollicking, independent O'Byrn. It remains for the lover to sound the nethermost depths of humility.

He watched his mail those two days with apprehensive eyes, fearing to receive a note which should administer his *coup de grace*. None came, and, as a natural sequence, his suspense increased. It is the axe suspended that the fowl fears; with its fall subsequent proceedings fail to interest the bird.

Finally there arrived O'Byrn's night off. It could be employed but in one way; he must become definitely acquainted with his fate. Behold him, with set teeth and an air of impending martyrdom, at the Muldoons' door at eight of the evening. It was a Friday evening, but Micky was desperate. He breathed hard for a moment, wavered, then rang the bell heroically. There was a soft stir inside, the door opened. It was dark in the hall. Micky leaned forward.

"Is that you, Maisie?" he breathed. "I—"

"Naw," piped a childish treble, "it ain't Maisie. It's her brudder, Terence."

"Sure," murmured Micky confusedly. "Would 've

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known from your general cut, Terence, but I can't see you. Where's the folks?"

"All out, Mister Micky," rejoined the youngster, thrusting his tousled head out of the doorway to inspect the visitor. "Ain't no one to home but me."

"Where's Maisie?" Micky demanded in a tone which indicated that Terence would fill no particular gap as far as he was concerned.

"Out to a dance," grinned Terence. "Gone with Billy Ryan." Micky's brow darkened, while Terence's grin grew wider. Billy Ryan! The cavalier who left a Manhattan to go out for beers! Micky's mind swiftly reverted to the Ironworkers' ball, to which Ryan had brought the lady and from which O'Byrn had escorted her home. And now—in a brief second Micky gathered some luminous ideas in evolution. He pulled himself together.

"Say, Terence," he murmured, with a cajoling wink, "take this and don't speak of my havin' called, see?" Terence nodded solemnly and closed the door, richer by a quarter. Micky strode savagely away, rich in a fund of swift-risen jealousy and in an empty, aimless night off.

"Ryan!" he ruminated with a groan. "I could stand for most anyone else. But a soak like him! Blast it! Can't a girl get next to anything nowadays but what drinks?"

And indeed, in these degenerate days, with teetotalers well nigh outside her ken, many a maiden has had often ample occasion to ask herself that question.

The pot having apostrophized the kettle, Micky felt easier, though the thought of Ryan was productive of

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inward profanity through all of that singularly tedious and empty evening.

There ensued a miserable week for Micky, though it was a fortunate one for the Courier. Misery produces a wide diversity of results, depending upon the makeup of the afflicted subject. The one it can render absolutely useless to the needs of the workaday grind. The other, beneath its bitter lash, becomes a human dynamo, plunging into the nepenthe of toil. Of such was Micky, and a nervously brilliant week was credited to him in consequence.

But though the course was eminently more beneficial to him and his endangered journalistic prospects than bootless brooding would have been, it was a sorry week for him. Moreover, it was an interminably long one. He would not have believed that such a week, filled with a restless whirl of work, could have passed so slowly. Conflicting emotions disquieted him, played pranks with an appetite for meals ordinarily as reliably fixed as sea tides, filled his days with a wan restlessness and troubled his sleep. For Micky, though the soft impeachment would have probably won from him a picturesque denial, was in love, and misery is a privilege of lovers.

He watched the mails and the postman. The latter never stopped and Micky anathematized him in his heart, also a privilege of lovers whenever thorns and nettles spring up in Arcady. It is curious, this universal mental arraignment of the postman for the non-delivery of matter never sent. Why, in all reason, should he be forced to figure as a buffer? Yet he is, and the rancor against him felt by the disappointed is all the more bitter because of the absolute necessity for its repression.

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One would acquire only merited ridicule and punishment for thrashing the postman, though one would often like to. One may only glare, and, if the postman notices it, he doesn't mind. He has grown cynical in service. So to revert, as the days passed so also did the postman; and Micky, while feeling quite murderous, simply glared.

Why didn't she write, and again, why should she? Micky writhed upon the twin horns of his dilemma. If she wrote, what in reason could she write except a definite sentence of banishment? If she did not write, what could the implied message naturally mean but the same? Oh, of course, he was out of it anyway. But in that case, what of Ryan? Was it possible that Ryan was considered preferable to him? When that query introduced itself Micky usually swore. Altogether it was a hard week.

On one thing, however, he was determined. The matter should be settled, once for all, on his next night off. Perhaps Terence had been indiscreet and revealed the secret of his previous fruitless call. Maisie might expect him on the following Friday night and be away. Well, he would fix that. So he arranged for Thursday night. A little cunning might insure at least an audience.

Behold him, then, on the fateful evening at the Muldoons' door, heroically despairing. A soft glow shone through the curtained parlor windows. Within he heard the soft chords of her little organ. She might have company, Ryan perhaps. O'Byrn clenched his teeth and rang the bell.

The organ was suddenly silent. To the boy waiting outside, the succeeding moment of suspense was filled

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with a tumult of loud heart beats, with strange throbbings at the temples. Then the door slowly opened. "Who is there?" asked a voice.

He stepped inside without a word, laying his hat on the hall table. Forbiddingly silent, she gazed an instant into his face, glacial blue eyes searching his own hungry ones, her face so cold as to cause him an inward shiver. Then without speaking, she entered the little parlor, he following.

They sat far apart. Her manner increased the gap immeasurably. Micky felt dimly that speech would partake of the nature of transmission over a long-distance telephone to the Klondike. However, he cleared his throat with some diffidence. It was something of an odd sensation for him.

"You were playin'," he ventured.

"Yes," somewhat pointedly, "I was."

"Well," he continued, "don't let me interrupt you. I like music."

"Oh, do you?" indifferently. "Sorry, but the pieces I was playin' are new ones. I don't know 'em well enough to play 'em before company."

"So?" he continued, calmly ignoring the reiterated hint. "Well, try some of the old ones. They're good enough for me." He watched her face eagerly.

It did not relax. "I think I've forgotten the old ones, Mr. O'Byrn," she said slowly.

"But I haven't," somewhat wistfully. "And it was not so long ago."

"Not so long ago!" her blue eyes brightening. "Mr. O'Byrn, it was longer ago than you seem to think."

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"Yes, I guess it was," dejectedly. "It's a long way from 'Micky' to 'Mister' after all."

The girl's lip curled. "It's your own fault," she retorted. Then with a sudden burst of hurt resentment, "I couldn't believe it at first," with an involuntary little shiver, "when I saw you that night. My brother was pretty mad, I can tell you, said I ought to shake you. Such a sight!"

"So your brother was with you," exclaimed Micky, half to himself. One maddening surmise had been set at rest. The thought of Ryan had haunted him of late.

"Yes, who did you think it was? Couldn't you see him?" with sarcasm.

"I'm afraid I couldn't," with a humility strange in him, "but I could see you, Maisie, and it sobered me."

"High time!" she flashed. "But then," with an impatient gesture, "It ain't pleasant to talk about, so cut it out. What did you come here for, anyway?"

He straightened. "To apologize, Maisie, that's all," he said simply. "Just that and to ask for another chance. I sh'an't whine or excuse myself. Only this. They gave me another chance at the office. Do I get one here?"

She tapped the carpet with an impatient foot. Her eyes were downcast, her cheeks flushed. Micky watched her wistfully. Suddenly she stole a swift glance at him, her blue eyes brimming with tears.

"Oh," she burst out, a pitiful break in her voice, "if I hadn't seen you—that way. It nearly killed me. And every time I've thought of you since—I've seen you—like that! Oh, Micky—" Her voice was lost in sobs, stifled in her handkerchief.

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He sprang from his chair, kneeling at her side, stroking her hair with trembling fingers, pouring out his soul in broken, incoherent words.

"I'm a beast, Maisie, a beast! Don't cry so—dear. It's always been so, it's what's done for me all my life. My mother's dead, thank God! She died before she knew. But my father," striking his clenched hand on the arm of her chair, "he's got it to answer for, wherever he is, living or dead! He was a devil, Maisie, and he made me one. He fed me the stuff when I was a baby and I took to it like milk; it was his cursed blood in me, I suppose. It's driven me from pillar to post, from a job to the gutter, time and again. It's been up one minute and down the next with me. Oh, I'm not fit to touch you, Maisie, I'm a dog to ask it, but I tell you that, if I play out the game alone, this thing will drive me to hell! Would you—stand by me, help me? It's always been stronger than I am, perhaps it always will be, but Maisie, I think I can beat it out, can be a man—with you!"

It was out at last, the sum of his passionate longing, poured out despairingly in a flood of wild unrecking words; without forethought, wrung from him by the sudden yearning born of the sight of the girl in tears. Now that it was over he remained silent a moment, still torn by his emotion and by hers. Then, slowly and fearfully, his stinging eyes sought her face. It was buried in her little hands. Tears trickled through her clasped fingers.

He rose heavily to his feet. What madness had possessed him, what presumption! He had asked her to marry—a drunkard. He laughed with bitter brevity.

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The sound brought the sight of a startled face with tear-wet eyes.

"Overlook it, Maisie," he asked desolately, as he turned away, "and good-by. I don't know how I came to do it—but you cried."

He was half way to the hall. There was a soft step behind him, a light touch upon his arm. He turned swiftly, the ghost of a wan hope in his haggard eyes.

"Ah, Micky," she whispered, with a smile whose tender memory would live for him in endless summer through autumn's falling leaves till winter's winding sheets,—"don't you—don't you know—why—I cried?"

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CHAPTER XIII

A WAGER

MICKY told Dick about it one evening, for his heart was full. His engagement was a serious thing to him, and something like fear mingled with his hope of the future. He was deeply sensible of his past mistakes, but he knew himself too well to look to the coming days with unshrinking confidence. He hoped, very humbly; that was all.

Dick was sympathetic, he understood. His was one of those rare natures that invite, comprehend and respect confidences. "You know my record, Dick," Micky had said. "There isn't much in it of a domestic tinge. But just the same, when I happen to get a night off and sit in the little parlor with her, it seems—" with a queer little break in his voice,— "why Dick, it seems as if I had at last—got home!"

And Dick had wrung Micky's hand until it ached, and assured him in his deep bass voice, eloquent with fervent earnestness, that he was all right, and poor Micky had begun to hope that, after a long and checkered season, he was.

The city was now fully roused to the contest that was being waged for its control between the Fusionists and Democrats, and, as a natural sequence, they were busy in the newspaper offices. One thing was quite evident,

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however, which was that the unexpected *coup* made by the opponents of Shaughnessy, at the Democratic convention, had rendered the chances of the Fusionist ticket dubious, to say the least. In fact, the Fusionists had been robbed, to a large extent, of their thunder. The spectacular repudiation of Shaughnessy by his own convention, the nomination of a man for the mayoralty against whom no word of civil or political taint had ever been breathed, had greatly lessened the Fusionists' chances of success. Where they had expected to be able to deal mighty blows, by pointing to the shameless effrontery of Shaughnessy in forcing a malodorous city ticket through his convention, they were now compelled to take another tack. The situation had been made the subject of an earnest conference between Colonel Westlake and the men controlling other pro-Fusionist newspapers directly after the Democratic convention and its surprising results.

So, in the assaults which the opposing newspapers, led by the Courier, were making upon the Democracy there was no hint of detraction of the Judge. How could there be? They contented themselves with the assumption that the respected and able jurist had been imposed upon. To be sure, Shaughnessy, having become notorious, had been sacrificed by his keen associates in their own interest. Should they be successful at the polls, the argument was made that Judge Boynton and some of his well meaning associates upon the ticket, despite their good intentions, would be powerless to cleanse the Augean stables because they would be prevented from so doing by forces within their own party.

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Fusion would furnish a new broom, guaranteed to sweep clean.

This was strong and logical reasoning, but there were signs that it was ineffective. There was a strong retort to be made, which was that the purifying movement in the Democracy had come from within. The leaders named were above suspicion; some of them were recognized bitter enemies of Shaughnessy. Men of influence who had joined the Fusionists, though Democrats, openly returned, holding that the necessity for Fusion no longer existed. As the Democrats had a natural ascendency in the city, the outlook for Fusion was on the whole growing rather depressing.

Following his humiliation in the convention, Shaughnessy had left the city for several days. Upon returning, he apparently took up the life of a recluse. He confined himself strictly to the affairs of his wholesale house, dividing his time equally between the office and his lodgings. He was no longer at headquarters, where the sight of him was once so familiar; he had apparently dropped all interest in politics, though nobody dared to ask him anything about it. When Shaughnessy first struck the town, said the old stagers, he was quite decently approachable, but he had ceased so to be for years past. It was noted, however, by some who chanced to meet him upon the street and glanced curiously at him, that he was ghastlier than ever, with sunken cheeks and dull eyes. He looked ill.

But there was one who had not ceased to regard Mr. Shaughnessy with suspicion, a suspicion that grew day by day, and that was Micky O'Byrn. When Shaughnessy left town after his rout, O'Byrn muttered, "Up

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to more deviltry. Wonder what it is now?" When he returned, and quietly forsook his old political haunts, Micky's sandy eyebrows were skeptically elevated and he murmured, "Underground! He'll come up somewhere." For Micky relied upon the evidence of his keen Irish eyes. Whether the act was committed through arrangement or involuntarily, Shaughnessy had winked. O'Byrn reasoned that winks by a man of Shaughnessy's calibre were not wasted. Curious that a "slick duck" like Grady, as Micky characterized that smooth orator, had required a wink. Perhaps he hadn't, perhaps Shaughnessy had simply grown over-anxious during the short interval between the speeches. Well, if Shaughnessy had grown unwittingly careless, that was his look-out, his and O'Byrn's. O'Byrn was looking out. He had said nothing and he was devoutly hopeful that he would have a chance to saw wood.

He was at Maisie's one evening, one of his customary "off-nights." These nights were coming to him of late as oases in the deserts of weeks. They had chatted, talked seriously of their plans, sung together to Maisie's accompaniment on the little organ, and now Micky regretfully rose, with a glance at his watch. "Well, girl," said he, "I've got to slide. It's gettin' late. Your pa'll be assistin' me."

She watched him with wistful blue eyes, loth that he leave, though she knew the hour beckoned his departure. He stood near the big lamp with its red shade, his queer features being mellowed, so to speak, in the ruddy glow. He grinned benignly at her as he reached for his coat. Anticipating him, she helped him into it.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed rebelliously, "isn't it the

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worst ever, this newspaper business! And a morning paper at that, with your hours turned wrong side out and a night off only once in an age! Micky, dear, why don't you get into something civilized?"

"You know, Maisie, the Constitution says all men were created equal," he observed soberly.

"Sure it does, but what's that got to do with it? What are you up to now?"

"Why, nothin'," he replied, an impish twinkle in his eye, "only it depends. One man may be as good as another, but it's up to him to prove it. A bunch of Socialist Democrats, in a town I was in once, put up a hostler for city judge against a couple of old lawyers on the regular tickets. Said a hostler was as good as a lawyer in this free country. True enough, in a limited sense. I know a lot of hostlers that are better hostlers than a lot of lawyers that are lawyers. I suppose you follow me? But, all the same, these fellows were lame in their argument for this reason. Their hostler candidate might have had horse sense to burn, but he hadn't read law. There's a lot of difference between horse sense and the law, Maisie. They finally took the hostler off and put a cobbler on, who came in last. Now don't strike me, Maisie, that last was accidental. Really, I didn't intend it."

"I should hope not!" with sincerity. "But I don't see what all this rigmarole has to do with what we are saying, or were. Have you lost your mind?"

"If ever I did, the finder would return it," he retorted whimsically. "It would make him dizzy. But to return to cases, what I said has got everything to do with what we said. Can't see it? Well, men may be created equal

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but most of 'em never learn arithmetic. The fellow who does has got 'em stopped. He keeps on addin', while they—oh, they're just multiplyin' every minute. They're all around you, I'm one of 'em myself. The mathematical sharp, who made a specialty on finance and knows the idiosyncrasies of a dollar better than a mother knows her child, keeps on subtractin' the other fellows from their money. When it comes to the division, why they're all workin' for him. That's Rockefeller, and by the same token, that's me. We're the limit on the extremes. He's got everything and I'm livin' on the rest. I've got nothin' and he's got it. See?

"There's a happy medium, but it doesn't help the majority much, for most of us are on pay rolls. For instance, one man owns the Courier and the rest of us are working for him. If I changed to something else, I'd still be workin' for someone. Why? Because the only line in arithmetic in which I could make good was a sequence of ciphers with no bigger figure before it. You catch the point, don't you? It's due to the mercenary age. Nominally I'm free and equal. Actually I'm about a 'steenth of one per cent. See? But what's the dif'? What you need in this dizzy old world is philosophy. I've got it to burn, but Standard Oil can't scorch it. Here's a motto for you, Maisie, and you can paste it in that funny new jigger you call a hat. It'll keep you smilin' on wash day, and that's a test for a woman. It's just this: take it as it comes, and, if it doesn't come, don't take it."

He was gone, this queer little man-gamin of vagrant moods, shifting as the winds, yet for the most bubbling with reckless cheeriness. Humor was the predominant

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note of his being. Its broad grace mellowed him; would keep him sound and sweet at heart, whatever the sum of the coming years. Did the winds blow fair or ill, he had within him the essence of logical living; a whimsical sense of proportion that enabled him to view himself impartially with all others, one of myriad puppets in the show. A success or a failure he might become, as the world judges, but until the end he would be too large for that littleness which is too often a hallmark of success, the littleness of petty vanity. So, with this greatest gift the Creator can give one of his children, the humorous sense of proportion that can make if need be a joke of futility, Micky would go on to the end, to success or failure; alike with heart uncankered and a laugh on his lips. There would never transpire a misanthropic Micky.

For a long time after O'Byrn's departure, Maisie sat still in the Morris chair, a pensive look on her pretty face, with vague eyes bent dreamily on the flaming wood in the tiny fireplace; for the nights had grown chill with the first presage of winter and the fenders glowed with warm hospitality on company nights. The busy flames licked the blackened slabs; hurrying over the charred, desolate spaces; leaping in triumph as a conquered fragment fell, under the espionage of a shower of scintillant sparks. The tongues of flame, with redoubled energy, again lapped the wood, eating into its vitals, withering its fibres with fiery breath, crumbling it piecemeal in a crematory of elemental ashes. At last, always working upward, the flames burst exultantly from scorched fissures in the topmost slab and curled in weird shapes above it; shapes that now approached a certain sane coherence; that again were indeterminate and distorted, vaguely writhing in a dim

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haze, like one's future. Finally the fire, spending its force, dulled and died, the ruddy flames slowly paling like the fading roses of a summer sunset. Then there was the black, desolate end; all light extinguished save for the baleful, red-eyed glare of a few scattered embers, dying on the hearth. Maisie sat erect with a sudden start, stealing an apprehensive glance at the clock. With a long sigh and a little shiver, she rose slowly, extinguished the low-turned lamp and departed for bed.

Meanwhile, Micky, a red-eyed cigar in a corner of his mouth, had walked leisurely and thoughtfully toward the city. His hands thrust deep in his overcoat pockets, he strode unheedingly on, lost in a wistful reverie. What a flower was this little girl of his, to be sure! And he—what had he done to deserve her? A little self-examination is good for a man, especially if it be followed by a little proper self-disgust. O'Byrn walked on in singularly chastened mood. The past? Ah, it was done; why waste time in regrets when one is young? The present was of sunshine in a blue sky; the future—

O'Byrn's shoulders rose in a little, involuntary, uneasy shrug. He turned a corner just then and looked up. The next instant he had retired unobtrusively into a dark hallway, where he stood, staring across the street.

O'Byrn could scarcely have explained his definite impulse for doing this. It was simply the half-unconscious manifestation of the news instinct. Without any needed pause for reasoning, Micky's news faculty had connected two apparently irrelevant facts as significantly allied with each other, prompting him to remain in the hope of securing something worth while. The wholesale liquor establishment of Shaughnessy stood just across the street. The

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curtains of the office were drawn, but O'Byrn saw the reflection of a light behind them. Furthermore, the sound which had brought Micky to a realization of his surroundings, a moment before, was that of a carriage, which had been halted a little way up the dark street, the corner of which O'Byrn had just turned. So O'Byrn stood in the shadow, watching Shaughnessy's office.

He had not long to wait. A few moments and he beheld the corner of one of the office window shades drawn slightly to one side. Somebody was evidently looking out. Nobody was in sight, for the street was a quiet one and was deserted at that hour. The next moment the door was opened cautiously and a man emerged. Crossing the street swiftly he passed by O'Byrn so closely that the reporter could have touched him, and turned the corner. Then was soon audible the sound of receding wheels.

O'Byrn whistled softly as he resumed his walk toward the city. The light of the aroused news instinct was in his eyes. Here was something tangible, bearing out surmises that had seemed wild to himself. What need had Judge Boynton, the esteemed Democratic candidate for mayor, to be secretly in the office of the deposed boss, Shaughnessy? Deposed, indeed! Micky laughed softly, then clenched his hands.

"Oh, if I can only get onto it!" he breathed savagely. "Whew! Lord! Lord! What a story!"

Had Micky chanced to look around at that moment he might have seen a man following him, who, had O'Byrn known it, could have given him some interesting and definite pointers on that desired story. The man had emerged from around the corner of Shaughnessy's build-

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ing a moment after Judge Boynton left and Micky had started down the street. Gaining the opposite side of the thoroughfare, the fellow, who had evidently been eavesdropping, followed O'Byrn, keeping some distance in the rear, until a point was reached where Micky turned to go toward the Courier office. The other man kept straight on.

A little later, as he had figured upon doing, Micky met some of the boys in a lunch room which they were wont to visit at that hour. Dick was there, and Mead and Fatty Stearns. The latter was talking.

"Gee!" exclaimed Fatty, breathlessly, while the expletive blew a formidable charge of bread crumbs toward the shrinking company, "but there'll be doin's this election! There'll be doin's! Watcha think, Micky?"

"I think you need an interpreter, Fatty, when you try to talk with your mouth full," replied O'Byrn. "Don't talk, Fatty. You sound like a dog that's trying to breathe in July; you do, really. One of those expectorating dogs."

"Gee! What's those?" demanded Fatty, helplessly. "Spitz!" replied Micky, and dodged a crust launched by the justly indignant Glenwood.

"Cheese it, fellows," put in Mead. "About this election. Fusion's got no chance now. Judge Boynton 'll win in a walk."

"For how much?" in a flash. O'Byrn's hand was in his pocket.

"Well," remarked Mead, reflectively, "I'm not exactly lined with dough, but I'll put an X on it. Have to stipulate that it's a futurity, though; for, needless to say,

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I haven't as much as that in my clothes three days after pay day."

"Neither have I," laughed O'Byrn. "This diggin' down was a bluff. But I'll see your ten all right. This bum line of witnesses will take notice. Loser touches someone to pay the winner. All fine 'nd dandy."

Mead acquiesced, albeit with an implied something of uncertainty in his demeanor. The rotund Stearns voiced it in nervous words.

"Gee! Mead," he exclaimed, "you're a chump to bet your stuff on another fellow's game."

"Go die somewhere, Fatty," suggested Micky. "There's no game yet, but," with a queer grin at Mead, "there's going to be before this thing's over. Want to renig, Mead? Can if you want to."

"No!" indignantly rejoined Mead. "I'll see it through. If you really have something in your Irish sleeve, O'Byrn, I'll bet it's worth the money."

"Nothin' yet," murmured Micky, as they prepared to depart, "but I tell you, boys, that sleeve's a Christmas stockin' just now, and I'm gettin' eye-strain watchin' for Santa Claus."

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CHAPTER XIV

A DISCREDITED HENCHMAN

MICKY strolled into the Courier's local room one evening, and, after hanging up his overcoat and hat, removed also his under coat and unbuttoned his vest. He then leisurely detached his cuffs and rolled up his shirt sleeves, to get arm-room, as he used to term it. Then, having indulged a taste for preliminaries which he was fond of observing, whenever he had the time, he sailed in. A half hour later he had finished his task and turned in the copy. There was a temporary lull, and O'Byrn leaned back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his red head, and dreamily watched the rings of smoke wreathing upward from the tip of his cigar.

"Wherever did you get a gash like that?" inquired a voice behind him, and Micky felt a finger touch his wrist. Mead, who also chanced to be disengaged at the moment, took an adjacent chair and stretched himself out comfortably for a chat.

Micky lazily extended his right arm and bestowed a curious glance upon a long, livid scar, just above the wrist. "Oh, that?" he answered. "That was an accident. Got it when I was too young to remember. Beastly night, eh?"

"Yes, trying to blow up a nasty rain, I guess. Where've you been tonight?"

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"Oh, out in society," grinned Micky. "Harkins sent me to do that Van Courts' recep' 'nd ball. Careless servants, though. I was glad to get away alive."

"Why?"

"Well, I was discreetly in the background, of course, and was edging across to get a better view when I fell over a pile of things on the floor that they'd failed to brush up. Hostess gave 'em the glacial eye."

"I should think she would," warmly commented Mead. "What was the stuff?"

"Why, a bunch of ultras had just been standing there," demurely explained O'Byrn, "and I fell over the dropped r's, that's all."

Mead viewed him darkly. "You ought to be killed," he remarked. "Such cheap and unseemly levity is unworthy of one who is pursuing this honorable, elevating, expanding career of journalism." This with an oratorical flourish.

A shadow of seriousness crept into O'Byrn's twinkling eyes. "Of course you're in fun, in a way," he told Mead, "but, just the same, you're inclined to take your 'mission' seriously. My boy, you're due to shed a raft of illusions. You'll find this 'career,' as you call it, is a good deal like a hobby horse. Pleasant motion, but doesn't land you anywhere. There's nothin' to it. I heard you talking the other day about 'the great equipment it gives a fellow for a start in life.' That's all right if taken in time, like the measles, but let me tell you something. You stick at this, and stick and stick, and by the time you're ready for that start, you'll be backin' up.

"You were a cub a while ago, Mead, and you made

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good. Naturally you feel good about that, for a lot of 'em don't. Well, you needn't feel good. You've got the germ, and it's fatal. You're to be pitied, for you're thoroughly *en rapport* with the job."

O'Byrn had warmed to his subject; his cigar stub described wild flourishes. "I knew a young fellow once, in the middle west, who went into the reporting line. Brighter'n a dollar and full of ambition and the opportunity hop. Tried hard, but hadn't the nose, couldn't make good nohow. Old man called him up on the carpet one day. Old man went it for a while and then the gosling got a chance for a squawk.

"'Why,' says he in an injured way, 'I cover my assignments.'

"'Oh, yes,' snaps the old man,—and he was one of the best in the business,—'you're all right on the stereotype, tellin' the people what they already know about. Any lunkhead can report a baby show. The mothers are there to tell him about it. But that's only half the game. The other and the hardest half is in diggin' out and tellin' 'em what they don't know about. That's what you're for and it's where you fall down.'

"Well, the old man fired him. He was lucky. He's gettin' the salary of three of us now and he's gettin' it out of straight life. Manages a district. The old man who fired him died a while ago. Next time my friend passed through that town he stopped off, just to shed some tears of gratitude on the old man's grave.

"Oh, you grin now, Mead, and you're thinkin' to yourself 'Old Carrots, the senile cynic.' But just you stick at it, and fail to sidestep the Juggernaut, and in years to come you'll remember the words your Uncle Mike is now

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addressin' to you and you'll feel the same sentiment the old farmer from up north wrote on the back of a check.

"Never heard of it? Well, it's true. Old fellow was from Clayville Corners. Got a check one day for something. Never saw anything like that before; always took his money straight. Someone told him to take it into town and get it cashed at the bank. So he blows in and shoves the slip in front of the cashier. Cashier says, 'You'll have to indorse this.' Old man was rather rattled but stayed game. Took it over to the desk and scribbled on the back this sentiment:

"'i hartily Indors this Chek.'

"That'll be you, Mead, in the coming days. You'll think what Micky told you and you'll heartily indorse. But it won't be checks. The only checks you get in this cussed business are over-draws."

"Nice, roseate view you take of your calling," sarcastically remarked Mead. "Why in thunder don't you get out of it?"

Micky's grin was illuminating and forgiving. "Because I can't do anything else," he admitted frankly. "But you can. Why don't you? Try politics. It's the graft these days. Then bimeby you can retire, like Shaughnessy, and will never have to work anybody any more. But just you stick at this newspaper stunt, and after a while you find, to your surprise, that 'the zest and thrill of news gettin' which is the fillip of the reporter's jaded life' is gettin' a dull edge. Of course, you're older than you used to be, and that explains most things, includin' the multiplyin' of troubles that come to you while you wait. The chiefest one is in your speed. It's O. K. when you're young and your blood is boundin'. You feel like that

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brute owned by the enthusiastic French Canadian. He was workin' a horse trade, and says: 'Dat hoss, she trot half-past two. He no trot half-past two, I give you to it!'

"Now, the trouble with the vet reporter is that by the time he gets to an age that is considered the prime of life in any other line, why, he can't half trot past anybody, and he gets scratched. And I think that will hold you for a while, Mead. Think it over."

O'Byrn yawned, glanced at the clock, and rose. "Well," said he, airily, "I'm off, don't you know, to see if I can find something to make me forget that society shindy. Oh, ya-a-s! Bubbles! you rude fellah; there now, Bubbles! Go 'way, Mead. You're not so bad, you know, but you don't belong. Tra, la! old chap, be good. What a pity you have to work for a living!" With which parting arrant nonsense O'Byrn considerately took himself off.

Arrived at the street, Micky's jovial grin faded and he walked along with a serious air that had been far more frequent with him of late. There was a sober-sided Micky that few of his mates knew. Often now, when the little Irishman was alone, the reckless light would fade in the blue eyes, leaving them unwontedly serious; the jovial grin would quit the freckled face, to be replaced by that pensive shadow that tells of wistful, wondering speculation regarding the veiled mystery of futurity. Such the spell of introspection that is cast when love comes to one, leading to grave heart-searchings, to the tentative facing of one's soul. There is as much of shadow as of sunlight in the path of true love, but there is substance in the shadow.

Micky was walking swiftly along, oblivious to his

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animated surroundings, when a touch upon an elbow arrested his attention. He glanced up, somewhat bewildered, and stopped. One of Maisie's brothers, Tom, was facing him.

"Hello, O'Byrn," abruptly remarked Muldoon. "Saw you passing me, lookin' dreamy-eyed, so I stopped you. Thought you might want to know. Maisie's sick."

"Sick!" echoed Micky, a scared look in his face. "Why, what—"

"Oh, don't worry like that," reassuringly. "We called in the doctor; he says there's no danger. She'll be all right."

"Yes," Micky returned anxiously, "but what's the matter, man? Why, she was all right Friday evening. I was there."

"Yes," returned her brother, "it came on real sudden. It's that fever that's going around; she came down last night. But she's got it mild, so don't you worry. It's too late now, she's asleep, but run in tomorrow for a minute sometime, can't you? It'll do her good. And don't worry, old man." With a hearty slap on Micky's shoulder Tom passed on.

Micky continued on his way, his heart heavy with the news. Of course, she was not in danger, but illness in itself is depressing to the young. They hate the sound of the word; the sight of suffering inspires in them an odd, rebellious impatience. The sun is needed to brighten the gray old world; why is it so often behind a cloud? "Poor little girl!" murmured Micky, the tears starting to his eyes. Why, only last Friday night she had been the picture of health and happiness, and they had sat side by side on the little sofa and talked of their modest plans.

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Yes, and he had run into the store the next day and chatted with her for a moment. And now she lay sick and helpless at home. A great wave of tenderness suffused O'Byrn's warm Irish heart. Would he call to see her for a moment on the morrow? Would he?

Micky pressed on at a furious pace, impatiently winking smarting eyes, puffing like a locomotive at a cigar whose end flared like a headlight. For the moment he was oblivious to his surroundings, though hurrying through a crowded, brilliantly lighted street. Mechanically he turned a corner into a darker one. A moment more and he was recalled to earth by a dry, remembered voice, a voice that broke disagreeably in upon his reverie.

"Can you give me a light?" it inquired, as Micky halted. "You seem to have enough."

Micky proffered his raging cigar and watched the man curiously as he lighted it. Oddly enough, considering O'Byrn's wide acquaintance since his brief stay in town, the two had never met. Under the dim radiance of an adjacent old street lamp, Shaughnessy's face gleamed ghastly white, the black moustache had an odd, limp droop. His weed lighted, he handed Micky's cigar back with a slight nod of acknowledgment and was about to turn away.

O'Byrn's deviltry, irrepressible and eternal, asserted itself. "You're lookin' bad, Mr. Shaughnessy," he remarked with impudent solicitude. "Tain't good for you, this night air. Don't you go to them; you don't have to. Make 'em come to you."

For once Shaughnessy's impassive mask was disturbed, which Micky noted with impish satisfaction. To be sure, it was not much. Where many a face would have been

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curiously distorted, the basilisk eyes of Shaughnessy just widened and glared a moment, that was all. Then they narrowed and became expressionless, while Shaughnessy deliberately removed his cigar from his mouth and thoughtfully emitted a cloud of smoke.

"Who are you?" he inquired casually.

Micky had recourse to his card case. "Allow me," he remarked politely.

Shaughnessy glanced at it and thrust it in his vest pocket. "I've heard of you," he acknowledged. "Fine night, eh? Good evening." He moved leisurely away. O'Byrn hailed him and he turned.

"I haven't one of your cards, Mr. Shaughnessy," suggested Micky, grinning wickedly.

Shaughnessy vouchsafed him a slight, sneering smile. "I don't think you need it," he retorted, "but I'm glad, I'm sure, that you gave me yours." He passed on and turned the corner.

Micky was a veteran newsgetter, which means that he was also a good detective. Wary as Shaughnessy was, he could not have known that he was being shadowed, though O'Byrn noticed him several times casting apprehensive glances to the rear. He smiled grimly at the implied tribute to his reputation and discreetly kept out of sight. In the meantime he had necessarily dropped some distance behind the boss, though carefully following him as he traversed successive streets. Suddenly, however, he turned sharply at a cross-alley, and when O'Byrn, hurrying his pace, reached there, Shaughnessy was nowhere to be seen.

Micky stood perplexed, cursing softly. He hurried to the end of the alley to Lawrence Street and looked up and

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down it, without result. He walked aimlessly here and there about the section, but no glad sight of Shaughnessy rewarded his keen eyes.

After some little time, however, O'Byrn saw a familiar figure crossing Lawrence Street, a block from the point where the alley intersected. The Irishman was instantly alert, for the man was former Alderman Goldberg. "Gad!" muttered Micky, "the woods seem to be full of 'retired' politicians." Gaining the opposite side of the street, Goldberg turned west and walked about two blocks, with O'Byrn discreetly behind, across the way. Suddenly Goldberg disappeared within a doorway. Micky chuckled softly.

"Up over Hogan's, eh?" he muttered. "So that's the trysting place." He must investigate, surely, but not just now. Perhaps there were other birds of the sinister brood to arrive. O'Byrn, with the canny discretion born of long reportorial experience, lurked for the present in a shadowed doorway. In a little while his caution was justified, for there arrived simultaneously at the "trysting place" the lanky Dick Peterson and the rotund Willie Shute, known to Micky for the precious pair of political rascals they were. "That fake convention! Oh, what a bluff!" breathed the Irishman, with a definite admiration in his subdued tones. One could honestly admire a masterly *coup* like that, nor could he withhold a certain tribute to the ability of the scoundrel responsible for it. Shaughnessy was a genius, burrowing in the dark places; where the searching sunlight would have been fatal.

Micky waited a little longer, but the circle was evidently complete. They would not naturally keep the boss waiting long, for O'Byrn made no doubt that he was

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with them. The Irishman was fired with an intense desire to hear that conference. Already he knew that Shaughnessy was there, and matters were proceeding under the same masterly hand as of yore; only it was "the hidden hand" now, and all the more deadly for that reason. O'Byrn was convinced that he ought to be an unnoted auditor of that meeting, though he knew there were difficulties in the way. It was not probable that Hogan neglected precautions against any possible disturbance of these little conferences, for it was a natural supposition that he had his orders to that effect.

However, nothing was to be gained by standing and speculating about it. So Micky, with sundry unspoken prayers for immunity from a broken head, crossed the street and approached the doorway. He opened the door cautiously and slipped inside. By a single gas light, turned religiously low, he saw the white aproned form of a waiter standing at the head of the flight of stairs. In that moment the man started down stairs.

The way to the cafe was through a long, dark passage, at the end of which the dim gas light did not penetrate. In an instant the wily O'Byrn had retreated into this passage, where he flattened against the wall. The sleeve of the waiter brushed his body as that worthy passed on into the cafe. A gust of boisterous talk and tipsy laughter sounded from the saloon as the door was opened. Then it was closed, and Micky, without a second's hesitation, made for the stairs and crept softly up, trusting to luck.

He heard a murmur of voices from the larger of the two rooms that faced a narrow hall, which in turn looked out upon a side street through its two small windows.

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Between the two rooms there was a narrow passage, terminating in a flight of steep stairs which led down into Hogan's kitchen. These stairs were seldom used. The building, an architectural anomaly in the first place, had been further mangled by the odd ideas of Hogan.

Micky slipped around into this friendly little passageway just as the waiter came up stairs with a loaded tray. Micky heard him knock, enter the room, and shortly return. To his disgust the Irishman failed to hear the waiter's descending footsteps. Evidently he was supposed to stand guard and see that the coast was kept clear.

Micky swore silently. Then he made a discovery which filled him with glee. The light streamed from the all-important room through an aperture high in the wall; evidently a disused stovepipe hole, which Hogan had carelessly forgotten to cover after he put in his furnace. More than this, Micky noted, in the dim light of other gas jets in the hall outside, that directly under this hole stood a small but substantial table, on exceptionally high legs.

To noiselessly gain the top of the table occupied but an instant for the agile Irishman. His eager, freckled face was thrust close to the observatory. He had a swift glimpse of that precious group, the charmed circle complete, and then occurred a thing that froze his blood.

Suddenly Goldberg, Goldberg of the illimitable brow, sprang to his feet with shaking fist and crimsoned face. He extended his arm; the swollen fist resolved itself into a single accusing finger, pointed straight at O'Byrn. Goldberg's little pig eyes shot fire, he glared murderously at the stove pipe hole. "Oh, you spy! you damned spy!" he yelled. Micky waited to hear no more.

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He gained the floor at a jump and swung around the corner. The unsuspecting waiter stood directly between him and the front stairs. Micky lowered his head and charged like a lively little bull. The dazed waiter crashed to the floor and Micky gained the bottom of the stairs in three bounds.

In that very instant, however, the sound of a loud commotion, a volley of curses, came from above. Instead of gaining the street, O'Byrn instinctively retreated into the dark passage between the stairs and the cafe, where he crouched and waited. The next moment, with a succession of bumps, some object came thudding down the stairs and reached the bottom with a deep groan. There was a rush of feet on the landing above, eager to follow.

In a flash O'Byrn had sprung forward, turning off the single gas jet, flinging the door wide open. Then, as a second heavy body came tumbling down the stairs, evidently through a stumble in the darkness, O'Byrn stooped, and gathering a limp, senseless form in his arms, gained the street. Dragging his burden, he wheeled into the adjoining alley. He heard swift footsteps in the street. Goldberg hurried by, limping and cursing. He it was who had fallen down stairs.

Micky chuckled. " 'Twasn't me they were after, at all," he muttered. Then he bent low, gazing sharply into the white face of his senseless burden. He gave a start of surprise.

It was Slade.

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CHAPTER XV

USEFUL INFORMATION

O'BYRN'S eyes glistened. Here were possibilities, to be sure, but the first thing to do was to get out of that quarter, which might be too warm for comfort in a few minutes. Even as the reflection struck him, Micky backed close against the wall, in the deepest shadows, as a man rushed past him through the alley. It was Dick Peterson. The whole gang must be out looking for Slade. To add to the discomfort of the situation, the weather made good its threat of many hours' standing and it began to rain. Slade lay inert, still unconscious from the fall. Micky scratched his head in deep perplexity. He had no intention of leaving the fellow, but what should he do with him?

Fortune was kind. At that moment a cab swung into the alley from Lawrence Street at a leisurely pace. The driver was evidently taking a short cut to more travelled thoroughfares. O'Byrn halted him and invoked his assistance in loading Slade into the vehicle. "My friend's drunk," he laconically explained, to which the cabby grunted a gruff assent.

Slade had recovered his jarred senses by the time the cab arrived at a point near Micky's lodging, and the Irishman prudently stopped the driver, and paying him, dis-

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missed him. It would never do to leave a clear trail for Shaughnessy's gang, should they chance to stumble upon it at all. He asked the still dazed Slade to wait for him a few minutes in an adjacent drug store while he hurried over to the city hall, which was near at hand, and telephoned the Courier office, informing Mr. Harkins that he had a chance for a future "beat" that would have to be improved at once, and he wouldn't be back. "All right, keep at work on it. We won't need you," Harkins telephoned, and Micky rejoined Slade.

He piloted Slade to his lodgings, took him to his room, lighted his gas heater and the two jets and installed his guest in the big easy chair which the room boasted. He took the rocker himself, drawing it confidentially close to Slade's chair. He then produced cigars, holding a match for Slade to light his weed. "Smoke up, old man," remarked Micky, cordially. "It'll be comfortably warm here in a few minutes. Stretch out and pull yourself together. You got a nasty fall." Slade smiled slightly, without words, and arranged himself luxuriously in the big chair, puffing thoughtfully at his weed. A pleasant glow stole through the room. Micky, also puffing methodically, was silent as his companion, philosophically waiting for the spirit to move. Cautiously watching Slade, he was gratified to see a sullen, smouldering fire in the queer black eyes, ordinarily as indifferent as a Chinaman's. Slade would evidently be in a confidential mood in a few moments, and Micky could well afford to wait.

Not many newspaper men could have expected Nick Slade, accredited heeler for the Shaughnessy gang, to wax confidential, under any circumstances, to a represen-

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tative of the press. His very presence at that moment, in the room of a reporter of the Courier, of all papers, was anomalous. But O'Byrn was shrewd. He had learned early that success for the reporter on a daily newspaper depends on his being all things to all men. Tact is the little key that unlocks all doors. A hundred different plans of campaign are needed for a hundred different men, yet every man must be met on a broad and common field of friendliness. Anything short of that curtails the reporter's field of usefulness. One shorter sighted than Micky would perhaps have avoided making Slade's acquaintance in the beginning, on the ground that he was not a respectable person. To be sure he was not. Slade himself would be the last to question the impeachment. Because of this very lack of respectability, Slade's good graces were valuable to Micky, for a large proportion of the news that the public revels in is garnered from the ranks of the non-respectable. There is little in the life of your ordinary, respectable citizen to keep the typesetters busy, for there is nothing sensational in virtue unless it be possessed by a politician. Then it is inexplicable. But the record of the ordinary esteemed citizen can usually be summed up in the horns of life's trilemma: birth, marriage and death, unless, indeed, he excels at golf. The newspapers still devote considerable space to it.

Slade knew the men who made much of the real news of the town, the news with fat head-lines. To be sure, many of them figured in it unwillingly, but that was a minor consideration, for their doings often made and sold extras. Chance had thrown Slade in Micky's way early in the Irishman's career in the town, and the re-

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porter's trained journalistic sense told him that Slade's confidence would be valuable. So it had been. The episode in Goldberg's saloon, when Slade evaded wrath that fell upon the luckless head of O'Byrn, had not ended their acquaintance. Micky had found occasion to do Slade some good turns since then. And now Slade,—from ambuscade, to be sure, but none the less effectively,—was destined to reciprocate tenfold.

Slade had been a heeler for the gang. It was not an important post, affording a pose in the limelight, but that fact had its compensations. Evidently Slade, in trying, perhaps, to fit himself surreptitiously for larger responsibilities, had come to grief. And, as Micky watched him, smoking in the big chair, he noted a fire of sullen resentment kindling in Slade's eyes.

"Say, old man," inquired Slade suddenly, "where'd you pick me up tonight? How'd you happen to connect with me, anyway?"

Micky grinned. "Why, I was up to the same game you were, I guess," he explained. "Shaughnessy passed me tonight, and, though I'd never met him, I couldn't help throwin' the con' into him a little, just for luck. I'd seen some things, you know, and I guess he was next to what I was drivin' at, all right. But he never turned a hair and went on, with me doin' a quick sneak after him. I missed him finally, but some of his gang blew along, and after a while I was up stairs in Hogan's, perched on a table and rubberin' through a hole in the wall. All of a sudden up jumps Goldberg, yellin' something about a spy, and I thought I was copped for fair. I was down stairs in three shakes, and I went through a waiter like a halfback to do it. I was just about to

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breathe the open when you bumped along down. You were dead to the world when I dragged you out, I guess, and I kept you out of sight of the gang,—which was looking for you, my boy,—till I got the cab. And here you are. Goldberg's as good a bouncer as his man Mulligan, ain't he?"

"Goldberg?" echoed Slade. "Nit, young feller, he never touched me. They were all grabbin' for me at once, and I shook the whole bunch, just as I did in that session at Goldberg's. I wound around like a gimlet for a minute and I was goin' some when I went through the door. Then," in a tone of deep disgust, "I had to miss my bearin's, of course, and when I brought my hoof down for the first stair I must have hit about the last one, I guess. Anyway, the lights went out." He shook his head mournfully, while O'Byrn chuckled.

"Don't you mind," said he soothingly, "Goldberg got a worse one than you. He bumped along down after you, and afterward he was hoppin' around on one leg lookin' for Nicky, who was just then safe in the arms of Micky. And then along blew the dear old cab. I told the cabby you were drunk, you know."

"Oh, you did, did you?" without enthusiasm. "No such luck this time. Oh, it's all right; it was a good bluff. Now about the rough-house. It was a funny stunt, your happenin' to be there at the same time I was. You've got your nerve with you, all right. As for yours truly, I'd been there so often before, without any trouble, that I must have got careless. Anyway, their talk was interesting and I shoved my face out from behind the sideboard a little too far, and up jumps that bald-headed dog of a Goldberg. And now my goose is cooked."

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He sat silent for a few moments, moodily puffing his cigar and scowling blackly. O'Byrn critically watched him, without words. The sullen glow returned to Slade's eyes, his sallow cheeks flushed slightly. Then, with a savage oath, he leaped to his feet, facing the waiting Irishman.

"See here!" he exclaimed fiercely, "I owe you for more than one good turn, and I guess if you hadn't happened to be on deck tonight those dogs would have killed me. You're a good feller and they're a bunch of yellow curs. I've worked for 'em for all I was worth for a long while, done dirty work for 'em, and what have I got? Just promises and a run around the rim, that's all, when I've got enough in me to be helpin' to work the calliope in the inside. And they know it, too,—they know I ain't no fool. Many's the time has Dick Peterson, the rotten liar, said to me: 'Slade, my boy, you're the stuff; we're goin' to take care of you.' Promises, promises to burn! And it's all I've had.

"Well, that's the way it went, while they kept on playin' me for a sucker. Many's the job I've done for Peterson that he didn't have the sand for to do himself. I was always willin'." Micky suppressed a smile at the injured sorrow in Slade's tones. The ex-heeler shrugged his shoulders wearily and resumed his seat. The savagery had departed from his demeanor, replaced by an air of dogged malice.

"Why, that gang of lepers," he resumed impressively, "that bunch of hard-hearted slobs would have dumped me in a minute, after that little scrape me and you was mixed up in at Goldberg's, if it hadn't been for Peterson, and he ain't used me right to any extent since then,

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either. But if it hadn't been for him I'd have got t'run down then, with never a thought for what I'd done for 'em. You're always pure wool while you can be used, then you're cheap crash; remember that, my boy. I was kin' o' hangin' on by my teeth, though, till tonight. Now it's some other burg for mine, or likely get killed. Well, that's all right, too. They're racin' in other burgs as well as this, and I guess Slade can make a few other little pick-ups, too, just to keep the wolf away." He smiled cunningly.

"But before I take the choo-choos out," he continued, his eyes alive with malice as he bent toward Micky, "there's a score to settle with this lovely old Shaughnessy gang that I'm thinkin' will jar more than one of 'em clear behind the bars. You know this Shaughnessy. He's a deep one, though I notice you was onto him the very day of the convention. Nobody knows what he's drivin' at except his own little ring, the ring that everyone in this buncoed town, barrin' me and you and a mighty few others, thinks has turned him down. Turned him down!" Slade laughed dryly. "Why, he's got every mother's son of 'em by the neck; could jail every cursed one of 'em and crawl out of the muss himself. Oh, I believe he could, he's the devil himself.

"But there's one that's fooled him," exultantly, "and he won't know how much till election day. Sure, they caught me tonight, but do you think for a minute they'll find out that I've been attendin' their devilish little seances for months, unbeknown to 'em? Well, I have. I was at the meetin' that decided this whole funny programme that is givin' Fusion black eyes every minute, and Fusion would have won out in a canter if it had

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anyone else than this devil of a Shaughnessy to buck against. I was at that meetin', and I thought I knew a thing or two, but say, feller, the nerve of that proposition got my alley. When Shaughnessy sprung it on the bunch I came near dyin' prematoorly on the spot by wantin' to jump out from behind the sideboard and tellin' Shaughnessy he was a gilt-edged dandy; which he is, if he ain't got no soul. 'But,' says the gang, when he sprung it, 'it won't work. They won't follow us when we talk of throwin' you down. The party'll get hacked to pieces in its own convention.' 'Gentlemen,' says he, 'I never mixed with the hoi-polloi anyway, didn't have to. You have. They don't like me and they do like you. Work this thing slick, as I tell you to, and you'll have 'em all marking time to your music.' And it was so. Remember the convention? The reformers thought it meant a clean bill; the grafters thought it would be a gang more lavish than Shaughnessy had been. Oh, it was a lovely move. And he's on top yet, and they don't know it."

He gave Micky a lingering look. "I'm for gettin' even," he said. "You've been trying to get onto the trail ever since the convention; you've had your suspicions. I saw you myself the other night; walked from Shaughnessy's office back of you, after that old whitewashed graveyard of a nominee for mayor had left there. I was there, just as I'd been at others, though Mr. Shaughnessy never invited me. Of course, they're careful about windows, etc., but I can always make good somehow on a still hunt. What do I know? I know the whole rotten business. The circle always goes into particulars and there have been some beautiful give-and-takes between Shaughnessy and old Graveyard-Whiskers. Whiskers

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don't want to stand, not for a minute, you know, but Shaughnessy holds him to the gaff because he's *respectable.*" This with a grim laugh. "Shaughnessy got his hooks on him years ago; it's a funny story, I guess. The old man hates to give up living decent; he knows if he's elected it'll be the worst administration of graft this city or any other ever saw. He can't help himself; Shaughnessy's claws are in him."

Micky was bending forward. Imagined possibilities were assuming definite shape. "Is is Consolidated Gas?" he asked, eagerly.

"Consolidated Gas!" Slade echoed. "Why, son, that's only the beginning. It's a long, hard story, a bigger one than you'll want to believe, but I know where you can get the proofs for it. I've been busy for a long time. When I saw the gang wasn't goin' to do anything for me, I began to find out about things on my own hook, and I've got a way of doin' it and I remember what I hear. When this thing was over and Fusion was knocked out, I was goin' to diplomatically introduce myself into a better thing, and then I'd have got it. But that's all changed now. When I remember that those lepers I've done so much for would have liked to murder me tonight, I get hell-hot. I want to see 'em downed now. I'm tired of the rotten town anyway. Now, I put you on, see? You have to do the work, for I've got to keep out of sight. 'T won't be safe for me to be floatin' around the old diggin's, for I'm a 'traitor' now, you know, and a 'dirty spy.' But don't you care, it's a rich thing for you. You'll be at the top of the newspaper heap. I'll stay around here on the q. t. long enough to see the fun, and then it's me quietly out. There's an Indian streak in me, I guess,

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and it's doing double duty just now." His malevolent face looked it.

For the next hour Micky listened to a recital that filled him with gaping amazement at a revelation of municipal iniquity, spreading to the State-house and even beyond, that was undreamed of by the general public. It thrilled him with the lust to secure as big, pulsing, astounding chapters in a vital news story as were ever written. At the close, and when some talk had been devoted to his plan of procedure, Slade arose to depart. "I've got some friends, in a quiet place, that won't give me away," he announced.

Micky accompanied him to the front door. "Good night, Santa Claus," he said, with twinkling eyes, and Slade, somewhat mystified, unobtrusively departed.

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CHAPTER XVI

HIS BETTER SIDE

WHEN he had seen Slade safely off, Micky returned to the office and reported to Harkins, receiving a late assignment of a night police story which they desired "fixed up" in the style which was peculiarly O'Byrn's own. He contented himself just now with telling Harkins that he had been after something which promised well, but "wasn't ripe enough yet to spring." He felt that the thing was so surprisingly big that it would be better not to mention it officially till he could be sure of being able to secure it. Slade's narrative had opened up thrilling posibilities; it remained for O'Byrn to secure the proofs before he could venture to say anything, much less to write a single line. This would take hard work and subtlety, but Micky looked forward confidently to the prospect of scoring the most brilliant *coup* in the history of newspaperdom in that town.

It would have to be done quickly, too, for the time was growing short. The Courier, and the papers which united with it in the support of Fusion, were pounding away on a forlorn hope, thanks to Shaughnessy's masterly checkmate. They were confined to inveighing against the past; which was black enough, to be sure. But the Democracy, having apparently reformed from within, was

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evidently preparing for a regenerated future. This called back many who had been temporarily alienated, and Fusion's chances daily grew slimmer. If the proof could be adduced for Slade's revelations, O'Byrn knew that a very simoon of public wrath would at the eleventh hour sweep over Shaughnessy and his crew. His eyes sparkled. The simoon should be forthcoming.

His work kept him late, and the gray dawn was breaking when he walked wearily back to his lodgings and tumbled into bed. It was long ere he could sleep, for the glittering possibilities of that story whirled through his brain. At last, however, he fell into slumber that was disturbed by dreams in which he engaged continuously in fantastic warfare with Shaughnessy, and in which he continually got the worst of it. It was in the nature of a relief to Micky, on awaking about noon, to reflect a little upon the good old adage that dreams go by contraries.

Having had breakfast at an hour even unfashionably late, Micky sauntered over to the office. He moved with unwonted deliberation, for this was to be his night off. He had thought many times of Maisie, who was ill, and had decided that late in the afternoon would be the best time to make the call her brother had suggested. He must kill a little time till then. So he took his way instinctively to the office, being one of those unquiet newspaper spirits that hover uneasily about the hive, even when they have a brief breathing space in which to drone a little.

Now that the first shock of the announcement of the girl's illness was over, Micky viewed the situation with more composure. Her brother had said it was not serious, and Micky knew that the fever to which Maisie

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had fallen a victim, and which was quite prevalent in the city, existed in a mild form. She would be out in a few days, but—ah! it was too bad, anyway. Micky sought indignantly to blink away the moisture that treacherously gathered in his eyes.

Reaching the office, he hung around aimlessly for a while, watching the rest of them work. He was more silent than usual and made rather brief replies to their greetings and subsequent comments. It was rather odd to see him mooning in this way, and they conspired together to "jounce" him out of it.

It chanced that a certain old gentleman from a near-by village was prowling about the office that afternoon. He was a relative of the business manager, who had asked the boys up stairs to "tell him about things." As he was of a very curious turn of mind, and very unsophisticated to boot, the boys soon saw they were in for it. They spied Micky, moodily gazing out of the window, and swiftly hatched a plan whereby the venerable visitor was soon introduced to Micky with the understanding that O'Byrn should "put him next."

Micky would not allow his mates, who hovered near in expectation of the fun, the satisfaction of any visible annoyance on his part. He grinned affably at the aged seeker after knowledge, and ceremoniously drew up a chair. "I can tell you all about it easier than I can show you," he explained innocently, then launched forth.

In ten minutes he had told the visitor more about the newspaper business than there really is. "Oh, what a pipe!" enthusiastically whispered the delighted listeners, whose presence Micky minded not at all. He dwelt particularly and pathetically upon the amount of work which

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is expected from a newspaper man by his unfeeling editors. Not content with ascribing to the luckless reporter a stint of forty-eight hours' work in every twenty-four, he calmly outlined an imaginary daily programme for himself that staggered even the credulous old gentleman.

"But, young man," said he vaguely, when Micky had finished and sat regarding him with owlish gravity, "what—er—what do you do in your spare time?"

The boys, knowing what weakness was Micky's crowning handicap, were in a position to appreciate the reply, which might have somewhat puzzled the old gentleman.

"My spare time?" mused Micky. "Well, let me see; what do I do in my spare time? Oh, yes," with a relieved expression, "to be sure. In my spare time I hunt for another job." And he walked out, followed by a roar of laughter in which the bewildered old gentleman did not join.

"What's the matter with me? I'm gettin' to be a woman!" muttered Micky a few moments later, as he turned southward from the avenue to go to Maisie's. For Micky had caught himself, to his disgust, bestowing remorseful thought upon the bewildered old gentleman. Why should Micky have "strung" him, why have made him the sport of his mates? Had he not gray hairs, were not his years of eld?

Now ordinarily these considerations would have troubled Micky not at all, and he might readily be pardoned his dismay at evidences of the growth of a crop of nice scruples, entirely new and perplexing. O'Byrn was not used to the subtleties of conscience. It was not so long ago that he could have dismissed the thought of the gaping old fellow with the moment of parting. But now

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the wondering blue eyes, the blank old face, dismayed at the concerted burst of shrill laughter, troubled O'Byrn. It would not have done so in former days; why now?

Why, it was the girl, of course. Micky's freckled face softened, his eyes grew wistful as the explanation occurred to him. Could he not trace, in a thousand and one little ways, a change in his life since she came into it? Assuredly, and for the better. Micky acknowledged frankly to himself that his love for her, and hers for him, was Christianizing him; not in a concrete sense, to be sure, for O'Byrn's thoughts were little concerned with religion, as such. Thrown upon his own resources at an early age, he was essentially a world-product; but now, through this love for a girl,—a new experience for him,—the little Irishman was undergoing a refining process that surprised even himself. No startling change was there, but in a multitude of little ways was shown the gentle influence of this new element in Micky's life. More of tenderness; more potent impulses to kindliness; free-flowing charity toward all. For, in the beatific dawn of love, is a summons for the best in poor, dross-ridden human nature to arise; and, at least temporarily, the happy lover radiates peace and good will toward all mankind.

So Micky, sauntering thoughtfully along, continued superfluously to reflect upon his irreverence to the poor old man,—who probably had not minded it half as much as O'Byrn did,—until the recurrent thoughts of Maisie banished the incident from his mind. He was dancing with her at the Ironworkers' ball, he sat with her in the little parlor, he heard the sweet voice of her—and it was with a distinct sense of bewilderment that he awoke to

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find himself halted mechanically before the little house in which she lay.

Advancing doubtfully, half fearfully, he rang the bell. The door opened and Maisie's mother greeted him. No, she said, Maisie was not seriously ill, was quite comfortable. She had been asking for him, would be glad he had come. Indeed, said Mrs. Muldoon, she had been wondering if he would come.

"Come?" echoed Micky, as he followed her in. "Come? Why, I've been thinkin' of her ever since I heard it. Gee! I'm glad she's feelin' so well. Hello, Terence!" He clutched playfully, in a rush of relieved feeling, at the thick thatch of the youngest Muldoon, who stood agape in the doorway, eyeing him. Terence grinned and took to his heels.

Maisie's mother ushered Micky upstairs. A light streamed through a partially opened door at the end of the hall. It was from Maisie's room, and Micky entered slowly, timidly,—as a devotee would approach a shrine.

As it had been through a mist, for the blood rushed tumultuously to his head, he saw her sweet face, radiant with welcome and love for him; saw the little white hands, eagerly outstretched toward him. In an instant they were lost to sight within his trembling own; he bent over her, murmuring broken words, with an odd choke in his throat and big tears gathering in his eyes. He winked them indignantly, strove to clear his burred throat. The attempt ended dismally in a strangling gasp.

The girl laughed tremulously; but the tears, summoned by the sight of the lad's emotion, were very near her own eyes. "Why, Micky!" she said softly. "What's the

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matter? Why, I'm not really sick, you know; that is, not bad. Only—"

"Yes, little girl, I know," he interrupted, recovering himself. "I didn't mean to go up in the air like that, honest I didn't. But seein' you laid up like this, why, it just hit me where I live, that's all." His lip quivered.

"There, there!" Maisie's mother, good old soul, was patting him on his meagre shoulder. "Of course it hit ye where ye live; in yer warm Irish heart, to be sure. But ye needn't worry, for the doctor says Maisie has a mild case and will be out soon. Well, I'll leave ye now, she's been lookin' for ye. Of course, ye can't stay long, for the doctor says she's got to be quiet. But have a little chat wid her, an' I'm glad ye came up, me boy." And she bustled out, radiating hearty, wholesome, everyday motherliness.

For some moments after she had gone the boy and girl were silent. O'Byrn had drawn a chair close to the small white bed and sat quietly, her hand in his. It was hot, the little hand, and fevered roses bloomed in her soft cheeks. Her beautiful eyes, alight with joy at his coming, gazed happily into his own for a moment, then closed, a little wearily, as she lay content.

Softly pressing the little answering hand, Micky looked dreamily about the room. It spoke eloquently of her, small and modest and instinct with peaceful purity. It was appointed simply in white, from the pretty curtains at the two small windows to dresser and bureau and quaint old-fashioned chairs. On a small stand a lamp burned dimly, for the outer dusk had turned into early autumn night. The tiny clock struck the half-hour.

Her eyes opened. "I'm glad you're here, Micky," she

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said softly. "I've been hopin' you'd come. I hate to lie here all day long. 'Tisn't natural," with a rueful laugh. "But I don't want you to feel bad, Micky. You don't need to, I'm all right."

"I know you are, girl," he answered heartily. "But it struck me all of a heap, somehow, seeing you stretched out like this. I knew you would be laid up, of course; but, don't you know, you can think about a thing all right, but it's different when you actually run up against it."

She laughed gaily. "Does anyone else say things just like you?" she wondered. "That sounds just like your dear old slangy self, Micky. But anyway, you hit the nail on the head, every time."

"And drive it through." He grinned joyfully at her. "Talk some more like that, Maisie," he urged her. "You sound like yourself. Oh, we'll have you on your pins in no time."

"You bet!" She smiled back at him. "Oh, I hadn't ought to complain, I know. Others are having it worse than me. There's poor Julia Orr, worked in the store with me once. She died yesterday—"

"Don't, Maisie!" His voice was unsteady. "Don't speak of dying—anybody! I can't stand it! I hate the thought of it!"

"Why, Micky!" Her blue eyes were solemn. "We all die, don't we? You've known it almost since you were born. You've got to get used to it."

He forced a smile. "Well, we won't talk about it now," he declared. "It's depressing. How'd you like your flowers?"

"Oh!" she cried, in distress. "And I meant to thank

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you for 'em when you first came in, and I forgot it. You ought to feel complimented. You drove 'em out of my mind. Bring 'em here."

"Match the room," he commented, as he complied. She smiled assent, and, selecting one of the white roses, raised herself upon her pillows and pinned it upon his coat lapel. "There!" said she, admiring the effect. "You'll do, now."

Again his wide grin cleft his freckled face. "The whole conservatory wouldn't help much," he observed. " 'Tis a homely boy you picked out, Maisie."

"My boy is good enough for me," she returned gently, "as long as he keeps on trying, and does the best he can."

His face grew shadowed. "That's just it, girl," he said, rather sadly. "Someone said once that 'the best is bad enough,' and if that's so, what of my worst?"

"Your worst is for you to fight," answered this young sibyl. "Your worst is never as bad as it seems to you, just as long as you keep on fightin' it. And you will, Micky, won't you?" Her arms were stretched impulsively toward him.

He caught her hands, his eyes burning. "Till hell freezes over!" he told her, grimly. "Oh, excuse me!" he added confusedly. "I didn't mean—"

"Never mind, Micky, never mind!" she told him, with a laugh in her eyes. "I know how you feel."

"Yes, I guess you do!" he muttered. "If I could only blot out some things—if I'd been different from the beginning—if I'd had some chance—if I amounted to something now—ah! dreams—dreams!"

"Keep on dreaming, Micky," she said softly. "They'll

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take you on the right road—you're on it now—and they'll come true!"

There was a hesitant step outside. He arose, bending and taking her in his arms.

"I hope—I guess—I'm on the right road," he breathed. "And you've shown me the way, little girl; you have, for fair. Well, I must be going, I hear your mother outside. I've stayed too long now; I mustn't tire you. Well, good night, dear."

He withdrew, to walk home with the dear shrined image of her in his swelling heart; with her tender words of faith in him to summon a maze of happy dreams.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE COUP IN SIGHT

THE succeeding fortnight found the Fusionists much exercised in mind. Do what they could, the trend was steadily, and with gathering impetus, the other way; the way of the devil, as the Fusion leaders firmly believed, but they could not induce the balance of voting power to think likewise. With the election now but a few days off, the chances for the Reform ticket looked hopeless.

"Oh!" groaned Colonel Westlake, in a conversation with the Courier's managing editor one evening, "if only we could nail 'em somewhere! But there was never a time when everything was locked up as it is now. You can't get anything. We've whaled all the chaff out of the old straw, but it doesn't do any good. It's a different proposition from what it looked to be in the first place, isn't it? I'm convinced, though, that if we could only dig up what's beneath the surface on this deal, we'd win out yet, late as it is. It's a forlorn hope, but everybody must keep his eyes open, that's all. I'll tell you one thing, the man that happened to turn the trick would have no occasion to regret it, and don't you forget it!"

Unknown to the Colonel, as it was unknown also to the managing editor and to Harkins, the man who was to turn the trick was steadily forging ahead in the process.

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Micky, however, had kept his own counsel. This was not a matter to be bawled from the house-tops, or even whispered in secret, until the moment came in which he might confidently warn his superiors to prepare to exploit the story. The task was one to be prosecuted with infinite caution, and he was pursuing it alone. It would be time to speak of it when he had it so flanked by facts, and fortified by proof, that the town should read it aghast and rally at the eleventh hour to save itself.

Meanwhile O'Byrn was not idle. He had already satisfied himself, by actual proof, of the value of Slade's tips. The time spent by that worthy in subterranean research had evidently been well expended. There was, clinched and ready for publication, much that was startling. The information had been gained, moreover, from various sources involving difficulties in handling, yet Micky had proceeded thus far without causing a ripple of uneasiness in the turbid waters, and the knaves whose undoing he sought were in blissful ignorance of the formidable net that was closing about them. The layman will wonder how this could be, but the trained newspaper man will readily understand how a "star" worker like O'Byrn, gifted with far more than ordinary subtlety, could accomplish a result which a good reporter, in less degree perhaps, has frequently to negotiate in his arduous calling.

The crowning fact, however, must be nailed home before the Irishman could spring his story; the fact to which all other things led and upon which they were dependent. The sublimely audacious hoax of the Democratic convention, the spectacle of hordes of unconscious puppets of Shaughnessy in the background, the exposure of masterly effrontery hitherto unparalleled in

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the history of political bossism; these were the culminating, dramatic features of the story, without which it would be as Samson shorn of power. To use these features, and invest them with facts to insure public credence, a difficult proposition presented itself. Judge Boynton must be revealed to the people as he had been, and, no matter how unwillingly, in case of his election would have to be again; an abject tool of Shaughnessy's ring.

Slade and O'Byrn both knew that the Democratic candidate for the mayoralty was running unwillingly; that he revolted from the ignoble part he would be forced to play. They knew also that he was compelled to "stand the gaff," as Slade expressed it, through some sinister, secret hold which Shaughnessy had upon him. But what was this hold? Whatever it was, upon its revelation rested the whole superstructure of O'Byrn's story. The Democratic party had nominated for the mayoralty a jurist of high reputation, during his years upon the bench, and in his retirement the recipient of general public esteem. Micky realized fully that an attack, through mere inference of wrong-doing, upon such a man, would be not only libelous but abortive in its effect upon the public. The people, judging from externals, looked upon the candidate as a true, untrammeled reformer. Micky knew that he was,—perhaps originally by choice and now assuredly of necessity,—a servile tool of the most corrupt political ring in the country; but the public statement of the Irishman to that effect would have to be backed up by incontrovertible proof.

It was truly a formidable difficulty, and one that

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O'Byrn chafed under as the swift days passed, bringing the election uncomfortably close, with not an effective blow as yet to stay the victorious progress of the "regenerated" Democracy. Micky had exerted himself to the utmost, continuously yet cautiously, in the attempt to possess himself, by hook or crook, of that hidden secret which was the still unlocated fibre of his story; but without success. With everything else practically "clinched," was he to fail with the goal in sight?

Micky returned from a brief call at Maisie's one evening. It happened to be his night off, and he repaired to his room, depressed in mind. He had found Maisie comfortable, but her illness was developing a lingering tendency that worried him. He was very tired, too, as he had devoted the day to still-hunting on the big story, for which purpose he had risen early after a mere snatch of sleep. Now, from brooding over Maisie, he naturally passed to pessimistic reflections over the story, for still the maddening kernel of it all eluded him.

Suddenly a cautious knock sounded at his door, as he sat with his red head sunk disconsolately between his freckled hands. Ere he could rise, the portal opened to admit Slade.

"Good!" ejaculated the ex-heeler. "Glad I've found you. Sent a kid up to the office for you, but he said you was off tonight. So I chanced it up here, sneaking along in the shade. I'm not gettin' under any electric lamps now," with a grim chuckle. "But say, get your hat 'nd coat. There's a little confab on tonight, 'nd we've missed too much of it already."

Micky was already getting into his overcoat. "What's up?" he inquired laconically, the old flame kindling in

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his eyes. He reached for his hat and extinguished his gas heater. Slade fully appreciated the crowning difficulty Micky had to deal with, and the Irishman knew the little tout was not there for any idle purpose.

"Shaughnessy 'nd His Whiskers are chewin' the rag again," explained Slade, as they went down stairs. "They're in Shaughnessy's office, as usual. Been there some time; hope we ain't too late. I know what you're after. Can't never tell, maybe they'll spit up somethin' worth while."

Micky knew Slade well enough to neglect needless inquiry as to how they were to manage to hear this private conversation. He had ample evidence of the former heeler's eavesdropping powers, and followed him in perfect confidence to the conference.

Gaining the street on which Shaughnessy's establishment was located, they proceeded cautiously, looking about to be sure the coast was clear. The reflection of a light gleamed dully behind the closely curtained office windows. "They're here yet," murmured Slade.

The street was deserted. With a warning gesture, Slade made his way noiselessly through a little driveway toward the rear of the building, Micky following. Slade paused a moment. O'Byrn heard him chuckle in the darkness.

"A man is always one kind of a fool," he whispered, "and most of us are most kinds. Shaughnessy, he's just one kind, but it's bad. He won't hire a night watchman. Do you mind coal dust?"

"Nit!" replied Micky.

"Then follow me," said Slade, "and mind you don't make any noise about it, either." He stooped, fumbling

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at a cellar window. "There's a broken pane here," he whispered, "but they're always careful to keep the casing hooked." He chuckled as he pushed the window inward and cautiously thrust the hook into the staple in the timber beyond. He then prepared to descend.

"But the coal, won't it rattle?" asked Micky apprehensively, as he drew near the window in readiness to follow Slade down.

"No," grinned the little tout. "They don't use this bin no more, but they used to. You'll know when you wash up afterwards. Well, come on, and be quiet." He disappeared.

Micky bent to follow him. Gingerly insinuating himself backward through the window, his legs were grasped from below and Slade piloted him easily to the floor. "Good!" breathed the guide. "Now come along, and just shuffle, or you'll be falling over things. I'll keep you in the open. The cellar's full of things." Manifestly Slade had been there before.

The obedient Micky "shuffled" cautiously along and the two proceeded without mishap to a flight of stairs, which they ascended cautiously. It was pitch dark. In Micky's strained ears the scuttling of a rat, across the floor beneath them, sounded unnaturally loud.

"Wait a minute," whispered Slade, as they gained the top. "Sometimes this door is locked and sometimes it ain't. If it is, I've got a key."

It was not, and the eavesdroppers stepped softly out into the big wareroom. Here showed the dim outlines of innumerable casks and cases, for the radiance of some distant electric lights struggled through the small, old-fashioned windows. A subdued sound of voices came

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from the office at the upper end of the room. Micky turned involuntarily in that direction.

"Wait a minute," whispered Slade, and tiptoed back toward the rear, O'Byrn following. Slade bent over a small cask, duly spigoted and with a couple of small glasses setting near it. "All the comforts of home," he grinned. He drew a couple of generous draughts and held one of the glasses toward Micky. "I know where they keep everything," he whispered, with a leer.

The fiery aroma was in Micky's nostrils. He hesitated, but drew back. "I guess not—" he began doubtfully.

"Take it, man," urged Slade. "A little whisky won't hurt you. Besides, it's a joke. Here's hopin' worse luck to Shaughnessy in his own stuff." Micky grinned, faltered a moment, and then lightly touched glasses with Slade and downed the liquor.

"Tastes like another," whispered Slade, "and proceeded to fill up the glasses again. Micky drank without further protest. The pleasant glow at his stomach infused itself into his veins, mounted benignly toward his brain. Always abnormally quick to respond to the spur of stimulants, he was conscious almost instantly of added zest for the adventure.

"Come on and be mighty quiet," murmured Slade, and the pair made their way on tiptoe toward the office. Slade approached the door, the upper part of which enclosed a wide glass, behind which hung a screening yellow shade. There was a narrow space below it, however, through which a view of the interior could be obtained, the shade being a little too short to quite reach the length of the glass. Through an open transom

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overhead the speech of those inside was clearly audible.

The eavesdroppers bent, looking into the office. Shaughnessy sat in his big leather chair, indolently puffing a black cigar, dreamily gazing toward the ceiling. Near him, in an attitude of deep dejection, sat Judge Boynton. The venerable candidate was speaking, while the boss might have been a thousand miles away. But the watchers knew that the jurist had the honor of his chief's undivided attention. It was a secret of Shaughnessy's success, the veil of icy indifference that hid so potently the dark workings of his own mind while he probed unerringly into the recesses of others.

"Why did you drag me in again?" the Judge was inquiring. "Were there not others; less tired, more calloused? For I was never calloused. You got your talons into me by a trick!" He clenched impotent hands. "I did—as I had to—for years, and, when the time came, I went thankfully enough into retirement. I thought I had done with you forever. And now—isn't the memory of the past enough without such a future as you have marked out for me—far worse than the past? It's not to be borne!"

Shaughnessy lowered his eyes. His cold, snaky gaze met the other's fairly. "You talk like an old woman," he sneered. "You sound like a paper-covered novel. I got hold of you by a trick, eh? Now you know how I got you, well enough. I put out bait that always lands supposedly honest men, like yourself, and you swallowed it, hook and all, just like a lot of other respectable suckers before you, and since. Well, what are you kicking about? You put yourself where you had to be useful to me, didn't you? Well, it's paid you, hasn't

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it? And this little programme we've got mapped out for the next two years, it's going to pay you, and all of us, so we can retire for good." He chuckled insolently.

The old man's lips set in a grim line. "I'm praying that I may be defeated," he said, "but if not, I'll be mayor of this town. I may—"

Shaughnessy straightened in his chair. His mouth grew repellently cruel, his eyes assumed the fixed glare of a serpent about to strike. "Now see here!" He spat out the words like venom. "I'll be elected next week, and I'll be mayor these two years coming. You're a decoy just now, and nothing more; but after the first of January you'll be a live duck, with a string on you, that's all. You must be getting into your second childhood to play the damn fool as you have been playing it ever since this thing started. You can't squeal, you can't afford to. If you ever did, it would be all up with me and a lot of others—but you'd go with us, so help me God! Now just you cast your eye on this bunch of teasers for a minute, and get sensible!" Reaching into a secret compartment of his desk he slapped down a bundle of documents.

The gray discouragement crept back into the old man's face. Shaughnessy smiled cruelly. Outside the office O'Byrn eagerly clutched Slade's arm. "We've got to have them!" he breathed in the tout's ear. "After they go," returned Slade.

The next moment brought dismay to the watchers. "I think I'll deposit these elsewhere," observed Shaughnessy casually, with a glance toward the badgered Judge.

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"I don't think they're safe here." He slipped them into an inner pocket of his coat.

Micky's blank stare of dismay was instantly succeeded by a sudden inspiration, a plan daring but desperate. He plucked at Slade's sleeve, drawing him away from the window. "He mustn't leave here with 'em," he whispered, and proceeded briefly to unfold his plan. Slade, who was of kin with O'Byrn in recklessness, was enthusiastic.

"All right if they stay long enough," he muttered. "Let's take a look." A glance through the glass showed the two occupants of the office, with chairs close together, conversing in low tones. Shaughnessy was evidently elaborating his programme.

"You stay here and keep watch," whispered Slade. "I can get over and back quick. There's a drug store two blocks away, and I've got an awful toothache," with a nudge. "Matches? No, I can get around here like a cat, and as still." He glided silently away. Micky resumed his watch at the office door.

The moments dragged by slowly. Micky grew impatient. What if Slade should return too late? And now the Judge was rising, donning his coat and hat. Shaughnessy was seeing him to the door; it opened—he was gone. Micky strained his ears, no sounds of a returning Slade.

Shaughnessy walked leisurely to his desk. Ah! it was all right, he was going to sit down. But no, he closed the lid of his desk; donned his hat, took down his coat from the hook, was leisurely getting into it.

Then Micky with difficulty repressed a startled cry.

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Out of nowhere, without a sound in the intense stillness, Slade materialized from darkness at his side.

"Quick!" gasped Micky, "he's going!" But for Slade's restraining hand he would have thrown himself bodily against the door.

"Hold on! do you want him to see us?" he whispered savagely. "Here! quick, put this on." He thrust an object into Micky's hand. "It's a mask," he explained, adjusting one of his own. "Gettin' 'em is what kept me."

The masks were of the grotesque little variety affected alike by house breakers and masqueraders. Micky learned afterward that Slade had a dubious friend in the vicinity who possessed such conveniences. After leaving the office he had bethought himself of the awkwardness of Shaughnessy's recognizing them in the prospective encounter. Slade had a long head.

The plotters took another look at the interior. Shaughnessy was standing with his back to them, leisurely selecting a cigar from his case, preparatory to going. "Now for it!" whispered Slade, and the two, looking like two simon-pure burglars, crept forward. Slade's hand fell upon the handle of the office door. Contrary to his expectations, it was unlocked. He nudged Micky, immediately behind, to impose caution, and softly opened the door.

The two passed inside as stealthily as Indians and crept slowly toward the unsuspecting Shaughnessy. Even in the silence his keen ear caught some sound—perhaps the repressed breathing of his assailants. At all events, he half-turned. As he did so, however, Micky leaped forward and pinioned his arms from the rear. The wiry

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Irishman drew the struggling boss backward, throwing him into the chair he had lately vacated and holding him there helpless. With a lithe spring, like a cat's, Slade was at his side, his hand over Shaughnessy's mouth, stifling a gurgling outcry in its infancy. With the free hand he applied a saturated handkerchief to the struggling man's face and held it there. The deathly odor of chloroform filled the air.

After a little, Slade removed the handkerchief. "I guess he'll do," he muttered. O'Byrn thrust his hand into the inner pocket of the boss' coat and extracted the papers, carefully transferring them to his own. With an afterthought, he also possessed himself of the unconscious man's keys.

He grinned. "It's us out through the front door," he said. "I'll keep the keys. He needs exercise, this fellow. He can get it chasin' round, when they let him out tomorrow, gettin' some more made."

They surveyed the inert boss, huddled horribly in his chair, his eyes closed in his ghastly face. "God!" breathed Micky, a creeping chill in his spine, "he looks like a corpse! Do you suppose you gave him too much?"

"Naw!" returned Slade, disgustedly. "Was I born yesterday? It's only his damned eyes. When they're shut, he looks like a dead one, for fair. Let's get out before he has us countin' our fingers."

They opened the door cautiously and looked out. The coast was clear. Extinguishing the lights in the office, they emerged, locked the door and departed. Huddled in the darkness sat Shaughnessy, his chin sunk on his

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breast, his hands clenched convulsively upon the arms of his chair.

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A little later, Micky, with crimsoned face and eyes unnaturally bright, approached Harkins' desk in the Courier office. He bent confidentially toward his chief with an electrifying communication.

"Get ready," said Micky, "for the damnedest feature story for the next issue that was ever sprung in this town. Yes sir, absolutely the damnedest. The lines are all out. I'm due for about five hours' sleep, and then I'll begin to gather 'em in, and there'll be a bouquet of suckers on every hook. I've got a lot of finishin' touches to get tomorrow, and I'll be able to begin grindin' it out early in the evenin', not before. Yes, I'll have it all. What is it? It's a slaughter, slaughter of the gang. Shaughnessy'll be wearin' stripes unless he ducks, and a lot more with him, includin' Old Whiskers Boynton. Not in time? Election only three days off? Wait till you read the story! Wait till the town reads it! They'll all be champin' the bit of Fusion and frothin' at the mouth. I've been at this for weeks, but the main stuffin' I only got tonight. It comes late, but it's a winner, and Shaughnessy, he's a dead one!"

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CHAPTER XVIII

A COUNTER MOVE

SHAUGHNESSY stirred uneasily in his chair. Then, with a convulsive shudder, he sat erect, one hand instinctively pressed against his left side. His head reeled, his bewildered eyes strove to pierce the gloom. With a swift intake of breath the deathly smell of the drug crept into his nostrils. Then he remembered.

With a snarling curse he sprang to his feet, drawing a match from his vest pocket with shaking fingers. He lighted the gas and glanced toward the safe, expecting to find it forced open. All seemed to be in order. The boss was perplexed. What had they wanted, those mysterious visitors?

With a sudden apprehension he thrust his hand swiftly into an inner pocket and found it empty. Then Shaughnessy, momentarily beyond oaths, collapsed helplessly into his chair. There was expression enough in his white face now, and it was of fear.

The papers were gone, filched from him in open assault, in a way of which the boss had never dreamed. He could have groaned in bitterness of spirit as he remembered what zealous care he had taken of those damning documents, veritable blood pacts of dark, unprincipled deeds, through which Shaughnessy held the wretched

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signers in the hollow of his hand. Though cunningly giving the impression that they were kept in his office, Shaughnessy generally had them in safe keeping elsewhere and disturbed them only when it was expedient that they serve some purpose like the cruel intimidation to which Judge Boynton had been subjected. And now they were gone. Shaughnessy cursed in his heart the fatal weakness for melodramatic effect, in which he was prone to indulge, that had exposed him to this fatal risk.

But who had them? Shaughnessy sprang up and paced the floor. He clenched his fists as he thought of Judge Boynton. Was it a plot of his? He dismissed the thought with a sneer. Such a desperate expedient was beyond the nerveless old jurist.

He felt mechanically for his keys and started to find them gone. What new deviltry was this? Then, for a moment, the impassive mask was utterly discarded. The white face of the baited boss grew absolutely diabolical, and he cursed as best he knew, and he was not an indifferent expert. Finally, with a weary shrug, he ceased and walked to a drawer in the bookkeeper's desk. He wrenched it open and took out two keys he kept there for emergency's sake. One was for the office door and the other would admit him to his lodgings.

Shaughnessy picked up his hat, which had fallen off in the recent melee, dusted it and replaced it. He kicked the cigar, from whose enjoyment he had been riotously debarred, into a corner and drew a fresh one from his case. Reaching into his vest pocket for a match, his fingers encountered something. Drawing it forth, his

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eyes rested upon the card which O'Byrn, on a recent evening, had with easy insolence handed him.

The boss' eyes, indifferent at first, stared fixedly at the card. Slowly kindling into the interest born of sudden recollection of the incident, the sparks deepened till they glowed like the orbs of an angry cat. Shaughnessy pondered, his face an evil thing to see.

"Damn you!" muttered Shaughnessy, at last, still staring balefully at the card, "I believe one of 'em was you, God help you!"

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Micky went straight from Shaughnessy's to the Courier office that night, and, after his brief communication with Harkins, he repaired to his lodgings. He lighted his heater, and, with a fresh cigar between his teeth, sat down to peruse at leisure the documents he had previously glanced over sufficiently to warrant him in making his triumphant prediction to the city editor. A damning array of evidence was marshaled in them, illustrating at once Shaughnessy's ruthless manner of binding a cabal to his interests and his weakness in recording in black and white such condemnatory proofs of the infamy of the forces of which he was the leader, and for whose deeds he was responsible. It was a quixotic idea of the boss', effective to bend his tools to his desires, but fatal if the accredited proofs ever became public property. Perhaps, Micky reflected, he had intended them for use if treachery ever compelled him to leave in a hurry, in which case the traitors would suffer while the arch-conspirator went scot-free. If this was the intent, events had anticipated it.

The most important exposure, for O'Byrn's purpose,

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was the one, duly fortified with proof in the papers before him, that Judge Boynton was a hypocrite. He could only conjecture how the Judge had placed himself in Shaughnessy's power, but that he had long since done so, through some official act of weakness or worse, was evident. For the papers proved that the old jurist, supposed to be a power for good, had been for years a power for evil. It was as a secret instigator of lobbies at the State House that he had shone, while the world remained in ignorance. Not alone notorious Consolidated Gas, but many another nefarious movement had owed its progress in no small degree to his secret machinations, and he had been well aided. Micky opened his eyes at some names which appeared in that damning record, as well he might, for they were those of the elect. Indeed, the evidence utterly condemned one of the pillars of the present Fusion movement. Oh, it would be a slaughter, in very truth; one of whose extent the optimistic Micky had not dreamed.

As he read the record, O'Byrn marvelled at one salient fact. These men, of brains and influence, of power and standing, were after all but the tools of Shaughnessy, the liquor dealer, the local boss. Local boss! Micky could have laughed. Why, this genius of the slums had his pallid hand at the throat of the State, and his snaky eyes were even now fixed on victims in higher places, even beyond its too-confined borders. O'Byrn was lost in admiration of the man whose power was the greater because unsuspected by the great public. He moved with much sinuous subtlety, like a serpent wriggling through the grass. He tempted through the cupidity of men worth while, and when they were in

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his coils they were held there irrevocably. He was a Napoleon of graft, and his ambition was as boundless as that of the Corsican.

There were in the record, too, the hints of several matters that would bear amplifying; stupendous election frauds, fraudulent registration lists and corrupt local deals. Micky knew where to get them, but it would be a strenuous day. It was with a mingled thrill and a sigh that he finally tumbled into bed for a little sleep before the deluge of the day.

He awoke unrefreshed, his sleep having been disturbed by wild dreams of conflict with Shaughnessy in which the boss was invariably the victor. Despite the reassuring presence of the materials for a sensation, Micky felt depressed while dressing. There was still much to do, there were some hard propositions to solve during the day, and there might yet be a fatal slip somewhere. Besides, he felt physically wretched. He had caught cold in some way and his head ached miserably. Then, too, in the depths of his heart there was a sick, unacknowledged apprehension; for the old enemy, after too brief a period of quiesence, was returning.

Micky finished dressing, and left the house for the restaurant, at which he was accustomed to obtain his meals. On the way he passed an attractive door. He hesitated, halted and turned back. "One won't hurt," he muttered, as he disappeared inside. "Just for an appetizer."

Breakfast finished, Micky, with a renewed sparkle in his eyes, plunged headlong into his self-appointed task, and it was a formidable one. There were sundry peculiar documents to scan. Obstacles in getting at

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them had to be surmounted, either through subtlety or a bluff; and O'Byrn was a past master in both departments. There were some men to see. Some could be handled with a convenient disguising of the real intention. Others, made to admit damaging matters through cowardly fears, were left in the hope that they had secured immunity for themselves. There was also the omnipresent danger, most dreaded by newspaper men on the track of a big story, of competitors who must be sedulously avoided. O'Byrn dodged them all, though with some narrow escapes, and it became evident that the story, in every detail, was to be his and his alone.

As Micky pursued his perilous though fascinating task, the story grew, gathering black force and sinister proportions. As the busy hours swept on, crowded with strained effort, the Irishman felt to the full the strange, breathless zest felt only by the veteran newsgetter; hot on the trail of a big story, warned constantly by the remorseless ticks of his watch of fast slipping time that waits for no man. The hungry presses must be fed at the appointed hour. Brain, hand, resource and tireless effort must combine to furnish the monster's food. So O'Byrn rushed through the teeming hours. He cut out luncheon, gulping down a glass of whisky in place of it. He had been dramming at intervals since breakfast, and he no longer approached the bar with hesitancy. The excitement of his quest made him reckless and the stuff served as an exhilarant, though he had not yet begun to seriously feel its effects.

He was completely engrossed in his story. He scurried here and there, as need required, gathering force like

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a machine under the quickening beat of the controlling engine. He was driven resistlessly on by that steadiest, most unfaltering of human impulses, the quickened news instinct. It was a task before which many a veteran would have quailed, but O'Byrn did not know how to lie down. He had, too, a distinct advantage in his wonderful memory. It enabled him to carry away valuable material gained in conversations where the producing of a notebook would have been fatal.

It was well toward evening that Slade met him unostentatiously in a quiet place. "What luck?" he inquired eagerly.

"Got the whole business," answered Micky, in a low tone. "I'm just finished, and I'm all in. Knees jackin' some and nerves gone up. But anyone that's worth doin' at all is worth doin' well, and Shaughnessy's well done. Now I'll tell you what, let's have a cocktail or two, and then some supper. Time enough to grind this out after that."

Slade glanced at him sharply, noting the flushed cheeks and unnaturally bright eyes. "Haven't you had enough?" he inquired.

"Enough?" echoed Micky, with a reckless laugh. "Why, I haven't begun yet. But I'll cut it out for tonight, after supper, and tomorrow, when the job's done, I'll celebrate." He led the way to the bar, and Slade, with a little head-shake, followed. He recollected an episode in Shaughnessy's place, the night before, with distinct regret.

Neither of them had noticed a man sitting at a small table, in a dark corner, not far from where they had been talking. He slipped quietly out as the two ordered

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their drinks. It was Shaughnessy's lieutenant, Dick Peterson.

Slade succeeded in inducing Micky to content himself with a couple of rounds and lured him away to supper. Much to his disgust, O'Byrn insisted upon going to a place with which a saloon was connected. There was another appetizer, and O'Byrn ate heartily, the food apparently serving to restore him to sense. All might have been well, but on passing out through the saloon, O'Byrn intending to go directly to the Courier office, he met a party of friends. Despite Slade's protestations he decided that he had time for "one or two more."

A few more draughts of the stuff produced the result that was usual with him when indulging. Clear-headed at the first, the stimulant suddenly fired his brain, rendering him deaf to protests or the voice of reason. It was the way in which many a debauch of days or even weeks had been ushered in. He sought only to quench a fiendish thirst, to indulge a mad, grotesque merriment. He was hazily conscious of Slade's pleadings for him to come away, of his attempts several times to do so, of dimly hearing the imperious call of duty; of being dragged back for another round by his boisterous companions. After a time he missed Slade, and forgot about him for a while.

Some time afterward, while gazing blankly at the clock in some saloon or other, he did not know where, a swift terror seized him. There was grim accusation in the clock's face. Micky took advantage of the momentarily diverted attention of his companions to slip quietly out. His story; yes, he must surely get to writing

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it. Ought to have started it before, he reflected confusedly.

Well, here was luck. A carriage stood near the cafe. Micky advanced toward it, and the driver jumped down and flung open the door. O'Byrn entered, with a drowsy order to drive to the Courier office. Then, ere the door closed, he felt a vague curiosity as two additional passengers followed him into the vehicle. The door was slammed shut, the driver mounted his box and the rolling wheels lulled Micky into drowsiness that was not disturbed by his silent companions.

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CHAPTER XIX

SUSPENSE

COLONEL Westlake, the principal owner of the Courier and the man who actively dictated its policy, sat in the library of his home that night with a look upon his face different than he had worn of late. As the leader of the Fusion movement, for which he had expended much labor and time, things had looked black to him until today, and his face had worn the expression that belongs to him who is fighting a grim, losing battle. He saw the opposition forging ahead with a resistless sweep which he and his co-workers could not stop, and it had been maddening.

But tonight a bright gleam of hope had dispelled the gloom of the Colonel's face. He had visited the office that afternoon and had a talk with the managing editor, who had told him of the effort that was in progress to checkmate the plans of the ring. He could tell the Colonel but few particulars, for Micky had not confided many of them to his superiors as yet. Indeed, he had had no time to do so. But the information was cheering enough to cause the Colonel to smoke his cigar that evening with an easier mind. "That fellow can get it if anybody can," he had been told, and the assurance fanned his dying hope into renewed flame.

The Courier's editorial rooms were unusually replete

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of life that night. To be sure, it was an old story, that record of life and death and the things that go between, called news; ground out there three hundred and sixty-five nights in the year. One night, generally speaking, was very like another to the various cogs in the human machine. Most of them were past cubhood, and the shifts of scene entailed by succeeding assignments, that once held a fresh charm of novelty, now spelled grim duty. Most men have illusions, but the jaded newsgetter loses them first of all. Most men may dream of what they may become; the newsgetter only of what he did not become. However, there is a compensation. The newsgetter has acquired philosophy, the real salt of the earth. It is better to watch one's Rome burning with philosophy than to collect the insurance thereon without it.

However, on this night there was a brooding excitement in the air. The big room fairly throbbed with it; the sense of an impending something whose significance but few of the force divined, but which they all felt. The harassed, anxious expressions on the faces of Harkins and a few others of the editorial force; their frequent glances at the big clock, their nervous onslaughts upon the mass of work, for it was a teeming night, revealed to every rushed reporter in the great room that there was something on and that it was something big. They stole covert glances at their chiefs and at each other, wondering what it was.

Time wore on while the tension grew. The big calm clock reeled off the flying minutes with exasperating insistence. The clock is the merciless monitor of the newspaper office. Men watch it, fear it, serve it as they

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must. They hurl the forces of head and hand, when the need calls, in a desperate fight against it, till its tickings are drowned in the roar of the presses that hold the dearly bought triumph; while the toiler sits spent and worn, body and brain full of the numb weariness of the reaction. Even as the roar of the presses dies in silence, there is again audible the eternal ticking of the clock, unresting through it all; registering in one breath the death of a day of labor, the birth of another in the next. Always the grim spectre with the scythe stands at the elbows of the men who write the news.

So the Courier's clock ticked on, while the hidden undercurrent of unrest, so patent even to those ignorant of the reason for it, grew in a fierce, irritating tug that was made manifest in disagreeable ways. Harkins' nerves were worn to shreds. His usual urbanity withered like dry grass in the fire of his hot impatience. The office fairly throbbed now, for it was an extraordinarily busy night. Election was close at hand, the entire city was wrought up over it, everything else had seemingly happened and was all coming in at once. Still there was that hungry gap, waiting to be filled with the story of a lifetime. Where was the story?

It was exasperating. Everywhere men were rushing like mad and Harkins helped them rush the more. His orders were snapped with the venom of a cracking whip lash, accompanied by black frowns that caused backs to bend and fingers to fly the more, or legs to hurry the faster, as his behest might be. It became a drive, a dizzy whirl of effort, torn with conflicting sights and sounds. There materialized hurrying figures, sharp orders, the jingle of telephone bells, the slamming of

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doors, the sleet-like rattle of typewriters, the soft rush of many pencils and the crackle of paper; the hundred and one distractions that contribute in the compilation of the record of a day of news. And constantly, as the whirl gained in volume like a rising wind, Harkins' tortured eyes re-sought the clock, and they held all the miserable apprehension of a miser for precious, fleeting gold.

"Gee!" exclaimed Kirk to Peters, as he passed that worthy at the end of the room, and paused a moment to wipe his moist forehead, "it's fierce, ain't it? Harkins is getting crazy. There's something up. What is it?"

"No," replied Peters, with an apprehensive glance toward Harkins, "there's nothing up, I guess. I think there's something ought to be up that isn't. That's the rub. Never saw Hark' so worked up in my life."

"Yes, but what is it?" reiterated Kirk. "It's something big, that's sure."

"I don't know anything more about it than you do, but I've noticed one thing. O'Byrn hasn't shown up tonight. I think Hark' expected him, and with something." He nodded meaningly and they separated.

Suddenly Harkins summoned Glenwood, who had the week previous been made his assistant. Dick had been also growing nervous for the last half-hour, his eyes constantly seeking the door, hopeful of a desired arrival which was strangely delayed. The story should have been well under way by then. Dick guessed how formidable an undertaking it had undoubtedly proved and had at first explained Micky's delay in appearing by

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the assumed magnitude of the little Irishman's task. But now Dick had grown painfully anxious.

He hurried to Harkins' desk. The city editor looked up with a black scowl, viciously chewing a cigar stub. His uneasy fingers drummed a tattoo upon his desk.

"For God's sake, Glenwood," he burst out, "what's the matter? It's ten o'clock. Have you heard anything?"

"Only that telephone message he sent me early this afternoon," replied Dick. "It was short but significant. You know I told you."

Harkins groaned. "Yes," he assented, "he said he'd need the whole paper tomorrow and a few extras. And now where the devil is he, anyway? Where was he when he sent you that message?"

"I don't know," Dick answered. "Richards called me to the 'phone, said someone wanted me. I recognized Micky's voice. He just blurted out that information and broke away before I could reply. I tried to get him to ask him if he needed any help and when he would get here, but he had gone."

Harkins' eyes contracted. "Dick, do you think—" he began meaningly.

"No!" interrupted Dick vehemently, "not at a time like this! Still—Oh, the poor devil!" he broke off, for the remembrance swept over him of a certain shamed admission to him of O'Byrn's own, the acknowledgment of the reason for a bootless career.

There was a brief silence, broken by Harkins' voice, raised in loud summons. "Has anyone seen O'Byrn tonight?" he asked.

Peters glanced significantly at Kirk. There was no

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immediate answer, but a fat figure, waddling on its way from the elevator to the desk, hesitated and finally halted. An odd breathless voice broke the sudden silence, the voice of Fatty Stearns.

"O'Byrn?" he queried, "did you say O'Byrn, Mr. Harkins?"

"Yes," exploded Harkins, frowning heavily upon the quailing Stearns. "Have you seen him?"

"Why, yes," assented Fatty faintly, while fidgeting upon his chubby feet. "That is, I did," explosively, "about eight o'clock."

"Well," fairly shouted his irritated chief, "where was he? What's the matter with you?"

"Why, nothin'," ejaculated Fatty desperately. "I wasn't with him! I kept out of sight so he and the gang wouldn't see me. They were heading for O'Sullivan's saloon."

There was a moment's silence. "Stearns," said Harkins finally, his tone now one of quiet resignation, "why didn't you tell me this before?"

"You didn't ask me," Fatty answered in an injured way, sidling toward his desk. "And besides," as an afterthought, "you couldn't, for I wasn't here. You'd sent me out on that armory business, don't you know?"

Harkins and Glenwood looked hopelessly at each other. "No telling where he is now," said the city editor wearily, "or the shape he's in. It's all up, I guess."

Dick's fist rapped his desk smartly, his lips met in a grim line. "Not yet!" he exclaimed. "It's worth a try, anyway. I'm going to see if I can find him."

He turned away, nearly colliding with a meagre little

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man who was hurrying toward him from the elevator. "You're Mr. Glenwood?" asked this worthy.

"Yes," assented Dick, with a glance of inquiry.

"I know you by sight," rapidly pursued the visitor. "I was mixed up once in a little deal at Goldberg's with a friend of yours, Micky O'Byrn. You came on after I slid," with a dry grin. "But that's nothin' to do with this. You fellows are waitin' for somethin'," with a shrewd glance at Harkins' worried face, "and the man who's got it is gettin' drunker every minute. I thought you ought to know."

"Do you know where he is?" exclaimed Dick, grasping Slade's arm in his eagerness. The ex-heeler winced.

"Sure," he assented. "I've got a pal watchin' 'em so as to cop whether they do a duck into another joint."

"What shape is he in?" asked Glenwood.

"Bad," replied Slade dubiously. Then, with a ready grasp of the situation, "I know a medicine cove that I'll bet could put him right in short order, that is for while you'd need him. Makes a regular specialty of it, one of his own patients in fact. But you'd have to hurry. I'm with you on the deal, for between us I've got a bone to pick with Shaughnessy myself and I want to see that story in tomorrow's paper. Why, I put O'Byrn onto it."

Dick turned sharply to Harkins. "Get everything ready, I'll have him here," he said confidently. "We'll fix him up some way. Hang it, we've got to! Of course, it'll have to be dictation. I'll 'phone you outlook just as soon as I can," he added, seizing coat and hat, "and you clear the decks. Now, Slade," and the two hurried to the elevator.

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Dick hailed a cab. "To Lawrence's saloon, on Forty-Fifth, and be quick about it!" directed Slade, and the two sprang in.

"I had supper with him," explained Slade, as the cab rolled rapidly northward, "and he insisted on a couple of drinks. He'd had several then, I guess. Then he was going to start for the office, but a gang blew along. Then it was all off," with an expressive shrug. "Stuff seemed to go to his head all in a flash, and he wouldn't listen to anything. I kept along for a while and tried to sneak him away. He'd start all right, but the gang would drag him back and play rough-house with me and chuck me out. About eight we came near running into some parties I didn't want to see and I simply had to duck for a while. He was in a gin-mill near the City Hall then, and I lost him some way. It was two hours, pretty near, before I copped him again, this time in Lawrence's. I got a friend o' mine to watch the place, then I caught a car for your office."

The cab stopped before a brilliantly lighted cafe and the men tumbled out. A young fellow, loitering about, approached Slade. "Well, he's gone," said he.

"Gone!" echoed Slade. "Where?"

"I dunno. No call for me buttin' in. He got in a carriage with Dick Peterson and another fellow and they drove off."

"Shaughnessy!" exclaimed Slade, with a livid oath. "Come on, there's no time to lose!" He dragged Dick toward the cab. "Shaughnessy's rooms, you know 'em —drive like hell!" he told the driver, and they were off like the wind.

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CHAPTER XX

OUT OF THE PAST

THE carriage stopped, unheeded by O'Byrn, who drowsed, huddled in a corner. "Come on," said a gruff voice, we're there." An ungentle hand shook the Irishman rudely.

Confused and dazed, Micky stumbled out. With a man at each arm, he was whisked through a doorway and up a flight of stairs that led to a suite of rooms over a corner grocery. Shaughnessy was unostentatious in his manner of living, as he was in matters of political procedure.

Before the befuddled O'Byrn had gathered his deadened wits sufficiently to decide that his would-be friends had mistaken his intended destination, the trio halted before a door which opened without any preliminary formality of knocking. "Ah, come in, gentlemen," said a remembered voice, which brought Micky to wavering attention. Then he was pushed inside, into the presence of Shaughnessy. He stared for a moment about the plainly but comfortably furnished room, then into the black eyes of his host. Just now they were alight with triumphant gleams. Micky sat down in sudden hopeless, though rather hazy, despair.

"All right, boys; a good job," said Shaughnessy, a certain insistence in his tone. Peterson took the hint.

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He plucked his companion by the sleeve and the two withdrew. Their footsteps died in silence down the stairs, followed in a moment by the diminishing roll of wheels.

"Well, Mr. O'Byrn," said Shaughnessy, suavely, "I'd like my keys if you're through with them, and I rather guess you are."

"Keys?" echoed Micky, a vague and rueful grin reluctantly visiting his face, "yes, I guess so. Took 'em for a joke. You can have 'em and be hanged!" He threw them violently on the floor and continued to stare rather helplessly about the room. Shaughnessy, unruffled, bent to pick up his property, stepped for a moment to the door, then seated himself on a chair, facing Micky, who sprawled supinely on a sofa.

"Who was with you in my office last night?" he inquired casually. "You know—when you got these?"

"Don't you know?" Micky's utterance was rather thick, but there was a cunning gleam in his eye. No amount of intoxicants, that the Irishman had ever taken at any time in his checkered career, had even temporarily robbed him of his sharp wits. Even though he might not be able to remember it afterward, the busy brain was in evidence throughout the spree; and the sub-conscious intelligence of the fellow, even when he was nearly physically helpless from over-indulgence, had often staggered his associates.

Shaughnessy was now to have a taste of this. "Don't you know?" O'Byrn had asked innocently and very thickly. Shaughnessy smiled dryly. The fellow was sufficiently drunk to be as wax in the boss' hands.

"No, I don't," mildly replied Shaughnessy, and waited for the desired information.

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"Well," answered Micky, with a tipsy laugh, "I'm mighty glad you don't. And now see here, let me out of here. I've got business—business to attend to."

"Yes," assented Shaughnessy softly, "you want to go to the Courier office. But hold on a minute first, I want to have a little chat with you, and it will be to your advantage to listen to reason. I suppose you're wondering why you're here. Well, when I got out from the influence of your dope last night, I happened to pull out of my pocket the card you gave me. Without bothering to ask just why, I knew I had you to thank for that little job. I don't know who was with you, but I'll find out. Anyway, there've been good sharp eyes lookin' for you all day, but, as the cursed luck would have it, they didn't cop you till tonight. You were getting drunk then, making it easier for us. Much obliged to you. Now, where are those papers?"

O'Byrn leered with impish eyes. "Gimme a cigar," he suggested. The boss handed him one with a scowl. O'Byrn lighted it uncertainly and began unevenly to puff at it.

The boss waited silently a moment, then a smouldering fire crept into his eyes. He brought his fist down upon the arm of his chair with an oath. O'Byrn's wandering glance shifted lazily to Shaughnessy.

"Aha! my smart young rooster," growled the boss, "I know who was with you last night. I'm getting dippy, or I'd have thought of it sooner. I forgot who Peterson said was with you when he first set eyes on you tonight. So it's Nick Slade, is it, that helped you with your little job last night?"

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"Lemme out and I'll ask him for you," suggested the Irishman. "I haven't got time to talk to you."

"Now see here," urged Shaughnessy, "I want those papers. I suppose you've got 'em on you." Micky made a mock gesture of alarm which the boss evidently believed was genuine, for he permitted himself a slight, sneering smile of triumph. "Well," he continued, "I'm on the level, I am. I'm not playing any dirty stab-in-the-back games like that little one of yours last night. If you'd used those papers as you meant to do, why, there wouldn't have been any use in talking things over now. But I know well enough, for I've been fairly busy today, that you haven't done anything yet and tonight's pretty near your last chance to scribble. Scribble? You're in good shape for the job, ain't you? Why, I'll bet you don't get the sense of twenty words I've said. But listen, you can get this." Shaughnessy bent toward him. "Turn those papers over to me, and do a quiet sneak out of town for good, and I'll make it worth your while."

"Yes," muttered O'Byrn, "I get that." His body swayed a moment, then straightened. His head wagged slowly from side to side, for the heat of the apartment was oppressive and the room began to whirl uncannily. Micky leaned his throbbing head upon his clasped hands. Shaughnessy smiled sardonically, believing him to be thinking it over.

O'Byrn lifted his head. "Say, is your name Shaughnessy?" he suddenly inquired. The question went home like a shot. Even through the mists that obscured his vision, the little Irishman chuckled as he saw Shaughnessy start violently, saw his white face go whiter. "No," pursued O'Byrn, with a momentary rally of his faculties,

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"I don't know what your name used to be, and I don't care. I was just guessin', somehow. But I'll tell you somethin'. My name ain't O'Byrn any more than yours is Shaughnessy. Here's the difference. I took the name of an honest man, an old fellow that was a friend to me after my mother died. I took it because it was an honest name, and my father's wasn't. I was only a kid, but I was old enough to hate the old man right, and try to change my luck by shedding his rotten name like a snake's skin. Since then I've rubbed along, but I've managed to keep honest, thank God, for I was born that way. Now I'll tell you the difference between you and me. I changed my name to get rid of one that wasn't honest, but someone else was to blame. You changed from one rascal's name to another, that's all, and you're gettin' worse every minute. No, old man, we won't make a deal for any papers, not this evening."

The fire faded in his eyes. With a spasmodic hiccough he fell back upon the sofa. The whirling room, which he had conveniently forgotten during his flat statement to Shaughnessy, swung once more in rhythmic, disconcerting circles before his swollen eyes. "Open a window!" he demanded. "It's roasting in here!"

Shaughnessy had remained silent since O'Byrn's outburst, regarding him balefully. "The window can wait," he said deliberately, "and so can you, unless you listen to reason. Now, you produce those papers, agreeing to keep your mouth shut and get out of town, for value received, of course. Either that or I'll promise you you'll be kept quiet till after election, anyway, and maybe longer. Things are ripe now and we can't afford to have you loose."

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The fire was rekindled in O'Byrn's eyes. Clenching his hands he half rose from the sofa, only to again fall back helplessly upon it, with a curse, anathematizing his unsteady legs while he pressed his palms against his whirling head. Shaughnessy watched him with malicious satisfaction.

Suddenly the recurrent hazy thought disturbed Micky, the accusing whisper of duty unperformed. Where it had lain dormant with faint stirrings, it was now imperious. O'Byrn sat bolt upright, groping for his watch. Snapping the timepiece open, he stared at the dial. Even through the mists, which he could not blink away, the significance of the hour smote him like a lash. For a moment he sat inert, a growing horror in his eyes that stared straight ahead. The open watch slipped unheeded from his nerveless hand to the floor, striking the rug with a muffled thud.

The sound roused O'Byrn. He pitched forward, gaining his feet, and reeled toward the door, which he shook impotently. He turned to confront Shaughnessy's sneer.

"The key—give me the key!" O'Byrn's steps toward Shaughnessy were unsteady but his face was eloquent with settled purpose. The boss thoughtfully moved so as to put a heavy table, standing in the center of the room, between him and the angry Irishman. His sneer faded, his look spoke of uneasy apprehension. Shaughnessy was not a coward, but he was not over-strong; and, to do him justice, his fear came more from the possibility that the strangely rallied Irishman might, after all, escape, than from any worry over possible damage to himself in the process.

Now O'Byrn was opposite him, his hands resting on

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the table, his blue eyes staring straight into the uneasy black ones of the boss. For the present at least, O'Byrn's will, intent upon a definite object, would control his wavering limbs. "Give me the key!" he repeated softly. The tone was clear, the freckled face grim with determination, the glaze of the eyes had been burned away in flame. It was an uncanny transformation.

Shaughnessy, watching the other warily, tried to temporize. "Those papers," he suggested, "they're all I want. Give them to me and—"

O'Byrn hurled the table to one side, where it fell with a crash. He leaped forward, extended arms hungry for Shaughnessy. Now they were reeling about the room, locked together in desperate, voiceless struggle for the mastery. A chair fell heavily. Now they fell against the prostrate table, but recovered themselves with an effort and fought on.

Shaughnessy had been no stranger to either physical science or rough-and-tumble, in the days before ill-health assailed him; but older muscles, further handicapped by acquired weakness and long disuse, were not a match for those of the wiry young man, even in his present intoxicated condition. Shaughnessy, his breath coming in gasps and his face grown ghastly, tried by every recollected trick to trip O'Byrn, but the latter wriggled instinctively out of every snare. Now he forced Shaughnessy once more toward the fallen table, the boss resisting doggedly. But he was weakening, and Micky, with a sudden twist, threw him backward over one of the protruding legs of the table and fell heavily upon him.

The Irishman's breath, heavy with whisky, smote the fallen boss full in the face. Shaughnessy, gasping and

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nearly senseless, lay with his hand gripped hard at his left side. As though he had dreamed it in his agony, he felt his opponent's hand groping in a lower pocket of his coat. There was a faint jingle—the keys! O'Byrn rose with a tipsy laugh, swayed a moment and turned toward the door. Then, with a supreme effort, Shaughnessy threw himself to one side, reaching out a hand and catching Micky about the right ankle. A sharp wrench jerked him from his feet and he fell heavily, striking his head against the table leg which had previously served for the downfall of the boss.

After a few moments, Shaughnessy struggled weakly to his feet and stood grimly regarding the Irishman, who lay unconscious, with closed eyes, the freckles staring strangely from his pallid face. After a time Shaughnessy bent down and examined the reporter's hurt. "Nothing serious," he muttered, noting a crimson abrasion at the right side of the scalp. Then he thrust his hand confidently into the inner pocket of O'Byrn's coat. His look of complacency changed to concern. He made a thorough examination of the pockets, then rose with a bitter oath.

"Bluffed me!" he muttered furiously. "He hasn't got 'em." He felt strangely weak, as the result of the late encounter, and moved languidly over to the sofa whereon Micky had lately been. Shaughnessy sat down, with a heavy sigh, to think.

His moody eyes noted an object lying on the rug. Leaning over, he picked up Micky's watch. The back cover swung open in his hands, owing to the defective spring, which Micky had never had repaired.

Shaughnessy turned over the timepiece idly, noting on

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the inner cover a woman's picture. And in that moment the dead-white face, ordinarily an inscrutable mask, became startling to see. His black eyes, in which there grew a slow, consuming horror, stared at the picture as if hypnotized by it, and on his face was the look which the living might wear if confronted, without warning, by the resurrected dead.

After a time Shaughnessy withdrew his gaze, and, with a convulsive movement, snapped the watch shut. Slowly, fearfully, he approached the prostrate young fellow on the floor, afraid of what he should see. Now he bent on one knee over the senseless O'Byrn, peering strangely into his face. He thrust the watch into the little Irishman's pocket, as if anxious to hide it from his own vision. Then, timidly, he raised the inert right arm of his victim and slipped the sleeve up from the wrist. There was the scar.

A deep groan burst from Shaughnessy's lips; in his eyes gloomed, with added intensity, the horror that was the heritage of the past.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE LASH

IN the breadth and the depth of evil in the man whom the world had long known as John Shaughnessy there was one wicked act whose memory was torment. Unprincipled, ruthless, cruel as he was, this thing, perhaps in inevitable reprisal for outraged higher laws, had long haunted him; disturbing his sleep, embittering his waking hours. For it was only just that a man base enough to leave, in far worse case than the widow and the orphan, those he was morally and legally bound to protect, should be disturbed by ghosts. It was remorse, it had long been remorse, from which this calloused devil was suffering. His evil, white face was a mask to hide much that the masquerader would have given all at times to have forgotten.

For a long time Shaughnessy bent over the silent figure on the floor; crouching, motionless as if cut in stone. His eyes, unnaturally brilliant, repellent in their fixed glare, rested long on the reporter's unconscious face. That face—how freckled, how grotesquely homely! Why, he had been a handsome baby! Still, the same mop of red, curly hair; and, after all, did he but open his eyes Shaughnessy thought there would be a definite resemblance to another. Shaughnessy recollected having been vaguely troubled once or twice before by this half-sensed

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similitude of the young fellow to someone he had known. He knew now. Why, the boy looked like his mother, of course; though there was only a pathetic hint of it, for his mother had been very pretty. This Shaughnessy could vouch for. Poor unfortunate, had she not been his wife?

And his son, lying on the floor; the son Shaughnessy had thought dead; was it not a joyful reunion? Shaughnessy groaned aloud, for he had long writhed under the lash of conscience for this one thing. The rest of his ill-doing did not trouble him; it was for the blackest crime of all, alone, that he paid the penalty. And a bitter penalty he paid, for, whatever the seeming, outraged nature generally exacts her due. This man had heartlessly deserted a wife who had been devoted to him, despite his deviltry, and his helpless baby; deserted them more indifferently than most men would leave a dog. It was slow in coming, the time of reckoning, but the day came when the black heart and soul of Shaughnessy quivered under the lash. And the lash bit the deeper because of the need for repression, for the man writhed in secret. It was Shaughnessy who lived; the other man was dead; yet his foul ghost, with the memory of the foul deed he wrought, would not be laid.

Shaughnessy, with a haggard glance at the motionless form on the floor, rose and walked uncertainly to an easy chair. He sat limply, a thin, white hand shading his eyes. He was oblivious to his surroundings, for the tumult of the past pounded in his brain.

The tumult of the past! What a record had been his, this white-faced man with hunted eyes that now stared with a weird, fixed horror back into the past. They saw

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again another man than the Shaughnessy of vile political power; a younger man, in whom was no repression; the slave of wayward passions which marred lives other than his own. But what were wife and child? Merely incumbrances then, and, toward the last, hardly to be borne.

And at the beginning? Why, the young man had once been respectable, and of the type to be pointed out as one destined to make his mark. Starting at the lowest round of a big business house, in a far-off city, it had not taken him long to prove his rare mettle, and at twenty-five he had reached a point further than most men attain in a lifetime. He had married a girl who believed in him as she believed in God—and she had been his dupe almost from the first.

Supremely selfish, treacherous by nature and with a stealthy leaning toward the fleshpots, he began early to betray her trust in cold blood. She did not know of this; she knew only of his indulgence in liquor, increasing alarmingly, and his growing taste for cards. He had drammed moderately from a very early age; now he had a fiend's appetite, while his passion for the gaming table grew accordingly. She used to plead pitifully with him to eschew the practices. At first he laughed; later he sneered. Meanwhile his dissipation had not affected his business prospects as yet. Often rioting through a sleepless night, he was invariably at his desk in the morning, and his house was glad to command his services, for he was a veritable business genius.

His wife, poor soul, hoped that the baby's coming would influence him to better things. It grew worse. His appetite for liquor, which was evidently inherited from some bibulous ancestor, grew tyrannous, and he was

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a willing slave. Lucky at cards, ordinary gambling became too tame for him. He fell to speculating, cannily at first, but with success and increasing indulgence in liquor came recklessness. The man's naturally cool business judgment was clouded, for he was never wholly sober now. Yet his business prospects were still of the best, for he succeeded marvellously in retaining his strong hold on affairs. The dawn was more than likely to find him reeling, but the opening of the day's business invariably found him at his desk, alert, coldly inscrutable, his wits more than a match for the sharpest ones that might oppose him. Dissipated as he was in those days, he engineered some brilliant *coups* which benefited his concern and increased his own prestige, to his material advantage. He was already pointed out as a man of power. He could have figured as a Napoleon of honorable business, as he later figured as a Napoleon of graft. Of splendid intellectual endowment, he chose to mar himself.

Their home-life, because of his course, had grown unspeakably wretched. They lived simply; the bulk of the man's income was expended away from home. The wife did not reproach him and she had ceased to plead, but she was pale and silent and sad-eyed. She knew all now, and she lived only for her baby.

Like many an infinitely better man, the husband's worst side was reserved for his family. The inevitable reaction of tippling, in a nature like his, rendered him fairly diabolic at times in his home; and the cruel spirit was the fiercer by reason of the need for its repression elsewhere. He remembered one morning when he stood shaving before his mirror, shaking from the effect of a

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debauch. It was several months after his son was born. His wife, in pitiful appeal to his better side, of whose existence she still dreamed, had softly entered the room, carrying the baby. She thoughtlessly approached from the side, and he neither heard nor saw her. A soft little hand, the baby's, crept into his neck. Shaken as he was, it startled him; his razor slipped and the blood spurted from a gash in his cheek. Blind with swift, unreasoning rage, he whirled with a curse and a murderous, involuntary swoop of his razor. She had sprung back with a sharp cry, but just too late. He heard again the sudden, shrill cry of the baby; saw the swift blood rimming an ugly gash above its little wrist; saw himself shriveling, before the horror in his wife's eyes, into a loathsome thing.

"My God!" he had stammered, "I—I didn't mean—"

She had recoiled, the flame in her eyes repelling him. Ever afterward her burning eyes, accusing him in memory, had caused his own to close spasmodically in swift desire to escape her gaze; had caused him to dig his nails into his palms in temporary agonized abasement. The grim mills of the gods, indeed!

The poor woman annoyed him no more after that, but she grew like a voiceless, accusing ghost. She was thin and pale now and her beauty was fading pathetically. As for him, his course grew madder, he plunged into dissipation as it had been an enveloping sea. By and by things began to go wrong with him; wild speculations turned out poorly, his resources began seriously to dwindle. With his old, clear head he could have repaired his fortunes, but now he saw things through a red haze, and in endeavoring to right himself with one reckless stroke, he lost everything.

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Well, it was time to leave. But he would not go alone, he sullenly decided. There was a siren to whom he had long been devoted, a creature of sensuous mould designed to hold enmeshed such evil souls as his. Nor, he fiercely told himself, would they go empty-handed. And he fortified his nerve with more whisky.

The newspapers accordingly had a sensation. One of the city's most brilliant and most trusted young business men was a defaulter to the extent of thousands of dollars, and he was gone. This startling fact, coupled with the simultaneous departure of the siren and the revelations of the defaulter's double life, made an attractive tit-bit. The wife and child, being of minor importance in this sensational tale, were quickly forgotten. The memory of the defaulter remained, and men confidently believed at first that one day they would welcome his return, shackled to an officer of the law. But it was not to be, though once the man, driven by the lash of belated remorse, had ventured to cross a continent and steal furtively into the scene of his early crime, on a bootless quest.

It seemed to him later that, following his flight with his siren, he had been drunk for years. The furtive sting was at work; he drank to deaden it. At times he would shiver and the cold perspiration would bead his forehead, for he saw again the horror in her eyes as she sought to stanch the blood that flowed from her baby's arm. More, he saw himself again, with hideous humor, repeatedly when he was in his cups, tearing her baby from her arms and plying it with toddy. The boy would take it like milk, he remembered; and the father was wont to laugh, with all the sardonic mirth of a hyena, at the anguish in the mother's eyes, and finally to hand back the infant with

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ironical courtesy and the observation "that he was a chip of the old block."

Yes, pleasant memories had the fugitive, while drifting from place to place with his paramour. The money was soon gone and he had recourse to the gaming table, with fluctuating luck. Quarrels were frequent now, and finally, after an exceptionally fierce one, in which two calloused, coarsened natures revealed themselves in all their hideousness, the precious pair parted. That particular weakness disturbed the current of the man's life no more, for Shaughnessy was done with sirens and their influence. With a revival of his old calculation, shrewd and cold, he decided that it didn't pay.

At the same time, too, he decided that whisky didn't pay. He had a will like iron, whether toward evil or against it. Returning reason bade him to be against anything that marred his self-interest, so Shaughnessy—which name he adopted after his flight of years before—said one day, "I'm done," and suffered ensuing torments of thirst like an imperturbable Indian. It was years before he again tasted liquor, though he never lost the craving for it; and even then, he severely confined himself to its use as a medicine, necessitated by his failing health.

After the siren had gone her way, and Shaughnessy took occasion to survey the situation with something of his old-time critical analysis, he resolved upon his future campaign. His honest name he had forfeited; it could not be resumed. Moreover, his natural cynicism had deepened with the years. It was the dishonest who prospered most, thought he. He had the brains, so let him scheme to prosper. Politics attracted him. He studied it for the science that it is, and he also studied men. He chose

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an excellent field in which to operate; he established his small liquor store, which was destined to grow larger; he made his modest entry into the political arena which he was to dominate. With infinite subtlety, by the power of a remarkable brain, he had grown into the sinister force he was today; nor did his evil success trouble him. It was the memory of his wife and child that haunted him; a memory that bit deep as a sword.

It was years before he risked detection by a visit to his old city to ascertain regarding them, for of course he dared not write. Time was generous and changed him much, however, in appearance, so finally he traversed the continent and furtively, fearfully, entered his old haunts. He did not stay long; there was no need. His wife was dead; he found her humble grave in an old cemetery. The boy had been entirely lost sight of; he had drifted away and might be dead for all that anybody knew or apparently cared. We poor worldlings might perchance be more sympathetic, more solicitous one of the other, if we had more time. But self-interest in the grim old world demands and receives the initial consideration of self. Shaughnessy turned back with a heart none the lighter because of the fruitlessness of his quest; back to the old search in dark places for pelf and power. There was nothing else left, and, as his ideals had never been high, his course suited him and satisfied his ambition.

The boss rose, swaying, from his chair; a strange weakness was upon him. He made his way toward the spot where his unconscious son lay prone on the floor, and he tottered like an old man. He stood looking down upon the boy, and for his most monstrous sin of all there was grim reprisal visible in his eyes. The boy was as he had

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made him—as he himself had been—a drunkard. Of brilliant mental endowment, as the father knew to his cost, the son's career was clouded by this bitter heritage; would be clouded to the end, for he lacked his father's iron will. And the agency through which the boss' black course had been menaced; that menaced it still; the son against the sire, unknowing and till now unknown! What a hell-born irony it was, matter for mirth of gibbering fiends. Truly, at last Shaughnessy drank the bitter lees.

He stood there, swaying slightly, his gaunt face bloodless, his eyes horrible. Mechanically he pulled out his watch, starting violently. Why, it could be no more than five minutes since the struggle. Five minutes—and in them Shaughnessy had lived long and bitter years! And now—

"For God's sake! For—God's—sake!"

The old, old prayer of agony, of deadly fear, wrung at the last from lips which perhaps had long ceased to frame that Awful Name except in blasphemy; the cry of the ages; the wail of the wicked as it is the hope of the blessed; the cry of despair which rends the throat of the pariah when face to face with Death.

What was it? Ah! Shaughnessy knew; while his face went gray, while he gasped for breath, while his hands sought and pressed convulsively his breast, through which throbbed swift, keen stabs of exquisite pain. The mists swam before his staring eyes as he reeled blindly, now with outstretched hands, toward the door of his den. It was the ancient enemy returned—and this time not to be denied.

Shaughnessy lurched through the door, and with groping hands, grasped the bottle. The fiery daught of

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brandy seared his throat; he strangled and the bottle fell from his nerveless fingers and broke upon the floor. The strong smell of the spilled contents oppressed the heated air.

No use—no use! Shaughnessy collapsed in the chair before his desk, his breast afire with suffocating pain. The gray pallor deepened; the eyes glazed. For a moment he lay inert, his form twitching. Then a sudden torturing thought brought him instinctively erect in his chair. It was like a dead man rising from his grave.

The money—the property! Why, who would get it? How had *he* gotten it? Never mind, it was his; they could not take it away. It should be his son's—who had tried to destroy him. Would he take it? Perhaps not, he might be that kind of a fool. Well, if not, why he could give it to charity. Charity! Shaughnessy laughed horribly, deep in his throat.

There might—there might yet be time. He made as if to brush away the mists that deepened before his eyes. He groped for paper—a pen, and drew them toward him. He plunged the pen into the ink well, overturning it, but he did not heed. He was going blind; there was a strange, rhythmic thudding in his ears.

"I—"

The single letter, grotesquely lonely, sprawled crazily, black and ugly, upon the sheet. The world would remember Shaughnessy as—Shaughnessy.

* * * * * * * *

O'Byrn stirred uneasily, for the noise of resounding blows was in his ears. He struggled to a sitting posture, and as he did so the door crashed in. Dick and Slade bounded into the room.

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"Ah! there you are," exclaimed Glenwood, striding over to Micky and pulling him to his feet. "There's been a rough-house. But where's Shaughnessy?" His eyes swept the apartment vengefully.

"Must have gone out," returned Slade. Neither he nor Dick noticed the partially open door of the den. "Better be gettin' out. He may be back, with more like him, and we ain't got no time to lose."

Between them they guided the stupefied O'Byrn outside and to the waiting carriage. Inside the den, crumpled horridly in his chair, with gaunt, ghastly jaw agape and with a look of terror frozen in his staring eyes, rested Shaughnessy; as he would sit through the night, as he would be sitting when they should seek him on the morrow.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE STORY

A HALF-HOUR later a telephone bell pealed in the office of the Courier. "You're wanted, Mr. Harkins," called an assistant. The city editor hurried to the instrument. "Hello!" he called. "Hello! That you, Harkins? All right, this is Glenwood. Well, we've got him. Working on him now. Be there by twelve, sooner if possible. Have everything ready. Good-by."

The office of Dr. Erastus Wentworth was a scene of animation. By rare good luck, Slade had found the medical gentleman in an adjacent restaurant immediately after the cab drew up at the building which contained his office. Dick and Slade had assisted the dazed O'Byrn upstairs, when Slade, fuming with impatience, set out on a search for the physician, which was fortunately soon rewarded.

They placed O'Byrn on a sofa and he immediately lapsed into dreamland. "Doctor," said Dick, "this man has a job to turn out tonight that would feaze many a fellow in his sober senses. He's simply got to do it tonight. It will take an hour, perhaps a half or so more. It must be started at midnight. I know it looks hopeless, but you don't know the man. If you only start his brain half-working it's worth a couple of normal ones

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under full head. What do you think?" He was pacing the floor in keen excitement. Slade stood near, silent, with burning eyes.

"Bad!" commented the doctor, dryly. "How much has he had?"

"Not so much," returned Slade. "He got a nasty bump; it helped."

"Well, we'll try," said the doctor, and was soon busy. Micky was sufficiently oblivious not to wince at the sting of the hypodermic needle, piercing his bared arm, forcing into his system the powerful solution of strychinine, the influence of which must be invoked to reinforce the mechanism of the numbed brain. Dick looked at the Irishman, sprawled supine upon the office sofa, still with closed eyes. It looked hopeless enough and Dick despaired.

A little later the physician was preparing with infinite care a mixture which he finally seemed to have ready to his satisfaction. He approached the prostrate man.

"Rank poison," he said grimly to Glenwood, "but desperate cases require desperate remedies. I fancy this will complete the job of galvanizing your friend for the time you require. Probably he won't exactly scintillate, but I think he will do." He administered the stuff to O'Byrn, who, half-conscious already despite his relaxed attitude, swallowed it obediently.

"Now in a few minutes," said the doctor, "you can start with him. But remember one thing," he cautioned Glenwood, "this brace is wholly artificial. It won't last. A little later and I couldn't have done much for you anyway. He'll run along like a machine for a while, that's

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all. Get all you can from him while you can, for there'll be a reaction."

"That's what we've got to do anyway," replied Dick grimly. "It's a case of racing the clock with us from now on."

A little later they descended the stairs, O'Byrn stumbling heedlessly down, assisted by Glenwood. The cabman had waited under instructions. "The Courier office in a hurry," Dick ordered, and assisted Micky inside. Slade followed. He had resolved to be in at the death.

As the cab rolled rapidly south, Dick spoke to the man opposite him, now rousing to a dull consciousness of his surroundings.

"Micky," he demanded, "have you got that story, all of it?" There was an assenting nod.

"Now listen to me, Micky," continued Dick, leaning forward in the dimness, fixing the other's stolid eyes with his own dominant ones, "you're going to turn out that story and it's going to be the story of your life. You won't feel like it, but you're going to do it and it's going to be a dandy. Now get your brain working. Think of that story, every stage of it, from the time you first started out for it till you finished. Fix it in your head, and when the time comes, just spout it. *Don't-think-of-anything-but-that-story!* Do you understand?"

There was but a single word of response, a little thick, but inspiring of confidence. "Sure."

Dick sat back with a long sigh. His hands were trembling with excitement. A moment later the cab drew up in front of the Courier office.

The elevator sprang upward. As its door was flung back for the trio to emerge, the big editorial clock chimed

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the hour of midnight. Harkins met them with white face and eyes that revealed the strain of the long hours of suspense. Behind him stared many other eyes, in which shone an overwrought glitter that came of the infectious tension of the situation.

"Well, O'Byrn!" Harkins' voice crackled with acrid authority. "Where's your story?"

The tone had the effect of a whip lash, awakening the habit of swift obedience born of long training. Micky had stood dumb with blank eyes, to which the scene and the actors seemed strangely remote, like a vague dream. But his chief's question pierced his numbed brain like sharp steel. There was an instinctive attempt to gather his deadened forces. His hand swiftly sought an inner pocket and produced a few penciled fragments which he threw upon a table. "There," he said.

"These!" exclaimed Harkins, hastily scanning them. "Well, where are the rest? Did you lose them?"

Dick interposed. "You forget, Mr. Harkins," he suggested. "He doesn't have to carry a notebook. Micky, where's the rest of it?"

"Why," he answered confusedly, "I remembered it."

"Well, do you remember it now?" persisted Harkins.

"No," wearily, "not just now." Then, again with that strange gathering of struggling forces, though the words came as if he talked in his sleep, "I'll remember it—after I get started." And he walked straight to his desk, eyes dead ahead like a somnambulist's, unheeding of the men who watched him silently with drawn, anxious faces. It is doubtful if he saw them. Dropping limply into his chair he reached mechanically for his copy paper.

"Not that way, Micky," said Dick softly, interposing

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his hand. "There isn't time. You must dictate it. Here's a man waiting for you."

Micky turned dull eyes toward the stenographer who sat nearby in readiness, pencil in hand. An expression of helplessness replaced the apathy in O'Byrn's face, as his gaze shifted to Dick. In his trance-like state he could not comprehend. They wanted the story, yet would not let him write it. There was a pathetic questioning in his look.

"Listen, Micky," said Dick very distinctly, bending over him. "It's not far from press-time. We've got to hurry. There's a relay of stenographers waiting for you. Now you go ahead and dictate your story just as if you were writing it yourself. Get your mind right on it. Talk your introduction, covering the main points, then start at the beginning and go through to the finish. Get everything in and talk it as it comes to you, but have it right. Don't be afraid of going too fast. They'll get it all. Talk it just as you'd talk it to me and get it all. You understand? Now, boy, *get into it!*" He placed the packet of Shaughnessy's papers, which O'Byrn had entrusted to him, in his hand.

Dick stepped back, raising his hand to quiet them all as they crowded around, staring at the motionless man in the chair. "Get back!" Dick whispered fiercely. "Get him rattled now and it's all up. Can't you see?" They softly moved aside and intense quiet fell, in which the measured ticking of the big clock sounded unbelievably loud. They watched the meagre figure in the chair with an odd fascination. O'Byrn, as if fairly hypnotized by Glenwood's words, was bending forward, hands pressed tightly against his temples, eyes closed and brow con-

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tracted in the supreme effort to marshal the dormant resources of his brain. So he sat, without word or motion, while the moments crawled by and the suspense grew into actual pain for every watcher in that great room. Once Harkins, with an expression of keen torture, slowly lifted a clenched hand and let it fall silently, an impetuous word restrained by a warning gesture from Glenwood, who had not once taken his piercing eyes from O'Byrn's face. Even as he gazed, the face of the other seemed curiously to change, as if a dead thing were stirring into life. It was as if Glenwood's iron will reinforced O'Byrn's own, infusing into it the power of concentration, helping it to rise superior to deadening influences, to assert itself in a hard-won triumph of mind over matter.

At last Micky raised his head, looking straight into Dick's eyes, which shone with satisfaction, for they read coherence in O'Byrn's own. The day was saved and there was a universal sigh of relief. O'Byrn extended his hand. Reading the gesture aright, Dick placed in it the notes which shortly before had been produced for Harkins' inspection. Micky looked them over briefly, scanned the damning packet a moment, and turned to the waiting stenographer.

Then came the story which swept the town that morning in a mighty wind that drove a monstrous tidal wave of public indignation thundering over an illicit crew and blotted out a corrupt municipal history. Yes and more, for the waters encroached even to foul halls in the capitol and washed them clean. It was a story involving so scathing an arraignment of those in high places that hardened veterans in the great room, listening to its steady

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flow from the lips of the drowsy man in the chair, gasped and looked at each other in momentary incredulity; momentary, because every astounding disclosure was fortified by the most incontrovertible of proofs. Micky had been a veritable sleuth hound on the track of that story. His scent had been unerring and in the marshaling of his verified facts he had shown positive genius. There was nothing asserted that collected statements and figures did not prove; no man arraigned, from Judge Boynton down, who was not pilloried in the proof. Noisome legislative deals, heretofore blanketed by respectability, were laid bare in exposed horror. The city government was savagely assailed. The vesture of fair seeming in the present campaign was torn away and there was revealed rottenness. The growth of graft, in repulsive forms, under the sinister genius of Shaughnessy, was claimed and proved and the telling ruined some flourishing careers. So on to the end, the arraignment transcending the expectation of all in its ugly features, as indeed it had Micky's own. It left no doubt of the swift dynamic effect upon the election, now close at hand. Truly it was the story of a lifetime.

He told it from beginning to end always in that strange, monotonous voice, as if he were muttering in his sleep, his eyes at times fixed absently on the stenographer, at others half-closed or turning blankly toward the ceiling. He seemed wholly unconscious of his surroundings after his task was begun, being absorbed in dreamy contemplation of his theme. As the physician had said, his brain was working like an insensate machine, driven for a while by the force of powerful stimulants. Yet always his wonderful memory, an instinctive force with him, was a

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potent line that led his groping mind unerringly through the gloomy labyrinth of the brain. At times he would falter for a moment, but once more grasping the thread was off again. So, unmindful of anything save the task he was mechanically pursuing, he swept on toward the end. Stenographers quietly relieved one another, typewriters rattled madly at the other end of the room, Harkins and an assistant fairly flew in the preparation of the copy; boys hurried by with it, take by take, everywhere was the sharp hum of the belated machinery, at last in motion. O'Byrn never noticed, but went serenely, logically, sleepily on, dictating as he would have written it. One might imagine he saw himself, as one detached, writing as he proceeded.

But now the fuel had spent its force. He was growing horribly drowsy, yet struggled on, impelled by a latent sense of duty. At last he faltered in the middle of a sentence and stopped short. His chin sank on his breast.

Someone was shaking him, he numbly felt a dash of something cold and wet in his face and opened his eyes. He tried to wipe away the water that trickled down his cheeks, when somebody's handkerchief was passed over them and he heard a voice, familiar yet far away.

"Wake up, Micky!" it appealed. "You can't give up now, you're almost through!"

"All right, Dick," he sighed wearily. "Where was I?"

Dick prompted him and he resumed at the break, still in the same even, expressionless monotone, and continued until the dark shadows again gathered before his eyes and he swayed in his chair. Dick's voice again rang its sharp rally in his ears and he braced desperately, dictat-

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ing the closing paragraphs. "That's all," he murmured. The receding footfalls of the stenographer sounded. Then came Dick's voice, a ghost of a voice from the other side of the world.

"Now you can sleep," it said.

Then returned again the shadows and silence.

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CHAPTER XXIII

WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE

O'BYRN reeled to and fro, in fierce combat with Shaughnessy. Again and again, while his breath came in gasps and his temples throbbed with his efforts, he had nearly gained the advantage, but the boss as often slipped from his hold with an ugly sneer, eluding him. And now occurred a grisly thing, for before his horrified eyes his enemy's body suddenly lengthened and changed into a monstrous, writhing serpent, wriggling sinuously toward him. He strove to scream, but could not, and the creature coiled itself in triumph near him. Upreared above its horrid neck was the swaying head, the ghastly face of Shaughnessy, who leered with his black serpent's eyes and darted a forked tongue. Now the creature crawled sluggishly toward him—coiled its horrid folds about him—and he could not move. The last coil tightened above his neck, while he gazed upward, strangling, into dead, unwinking, awful eyes, the eyes of Shaughnessy. Now he was borne backward; the creature was shattering his head upon the floor. Thud!—thud!—thud!

O'Byrn fairly shot out of bed, groaning as the impact of his feet upon the floor sent a diabolical thrust of pain through his aching head. He pressed his temples convulsively and closed his eyes, blinded by the glare of

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sunlight through the window. Why, what was that? Somebody was pounding insistently at his door. It was that which had awakened him.

"What is it?" he called.

His landlady answered him, a certain morbid excitement in her voice; the threnody of ill tidings.

"There was a young fellow after you just now, Mr. O'Byrn," she said. "Said to tell you to come right away if you wanted to see his sister alive. He didn't wait, he went right away. Said for you to hurry."

She waited, a moment, and, receiving no answer, turned away and descended the stairs. Inside his room O'Byrn stood with clenched hands, rigid as if turned to stone. His bloodshot eyes dilated with misery; his freckled face paled with the slow, cruel realization of the import of the message, so horridly unreal, so full of heart-break.

It was with a long, shuddering sigh that he turned at last to his ablutions and dressing, which he performed mechanically, his mind meanwhile groping—groping—for the horrible truth, striving to understand what they had told him. He glanced at his watch as he finished dressing. It was two of the afternoon; he had slept long. He glanced absently in the mirror as he arranged his tie. The glass reflected heavy, unnatural eyes, in which despair brooded like a cloud; a haggard face in which the freckles stared strangely forth from unaccustomed pallor. O'Byrn looked at the reflection as absently as he would have bestowed a passing glance upon a stranger. Then, seizing his hat and coat, he left the house.

The landlady met him at the foot of the stairs, and inquired, with a manner of mingled curiosity and kind-

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liness, whether he would not have something to eat. Micky declined the offer with a silent gesture; he could not have spoken just then.

He stumbled blindly out upon the street, blinking eyes that were blurred in the chill sunshine. Sharp pains shot through his head; the villainous old feelings, so well remembered, racked him cruelly. The odd depression, which always followed his indulgence, was bad enough, but now—

A dumb terror seized him, driving him on at a headlong pace toward the corner which his car would pass. He threaded a tortuous course impatiently through the deepening throng in a congested quarter. There was an unwonted air of general excitement; newsboys were shrilly calling extras, their wares melting like April snows. O'Byrn plunged on, paying no heed, as if he did not hear or see. Nor did he, for he was deaf to all but one voice of terror, the need for haste; blind to all but one fearsome sight, that of impending death.

Gaining the corner, he fumed silently for an eternity of two minutes till his car approached. A little later, in haste and in cruel fear, he was traversing the street, was approaching the little house. He hesitated at the door a moment, fearing to ring. But they had been watching and the door was opened for him.

He looked dumbly into the swollen eyes of her mother, strained questioning in his own. "Go up, my boy," she said brokenly, "you're not here any too soon. She wanted you; she thinks the world o' you—the world she's leavin'." Her voice choked with tears.

She stood aside for him to pass, but still he hesitated, questioning her with his pathetic gaze. "But I can't un-

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derstand it," he faltered, "I can't understand it. How has it happened?"

He asked it like a child, and the mother in her rose superior to her pain. Her face grew very tender, her hand sought his shoulder with a comforting touch. Her eyes were wet; but they were brave with the sorrows of years, the sorrows that bring wisdom.

"It's God's will," she said. "She'd not been so well for a couple of days, but we didn't think it was serious. Why, the doctor himself didn't think so. But this mornin' she began sinkin', and now—it's almost over. She kept askin' for you, and I sent Terence once, but he couldn't find the place, poor little fellow. So I sent Jack, and he left word for you. He hasn't come back; he hasn't the heart. The—the priest has just gone."

"The priest!" O'Byrn echoed, and reeled where he stood. Somehow the two words, grimly eloquent of the preparation of the poor pilgrim for the final journey, at last brought the bitter truth home.

The mother faced him with solemn eyes, her brave, toil-worn hands seeking his own. "Ah, my boy," she told him, "you must live to learn, as I have. I buried her father, long years gone, and it seemed as if I couldn't bear it; and I buried her little sister—as I'll bury her. Ah, you're young yet, Micky, and it's only as you grow older that you'll learn to thank God for the priest, as I do. He's the link between God and us, boy, and it can't break—never. This almost kills me," she told him, with a stifled sob, "but I felt—when the good father went away just now—that God does live, and she'll be safe—safe with his blessed saints forever—and he'll keep her for me. And now—go to her—go and say—good-by." The

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brave voice broke in irrepressible sobs; she turned blindly toward the little parlor.

As in a dream he ascended the stairs; entered the little room as a pilgrim approaches a shrine. A uniformed nurse, sitting by the bed, looked up and softly withdrew. The girl, very still and white among her pillows, drew him with eyes he would remember always; eyes whose look would lead upward to the end—and the beginning.

The shades had been drawn and the room was in soft dusk. The door closed gently behind the retiring nurse. They were alone, while the shadows deepened. Voiceless, he drew near to her, fell on his knees beside the white bed, sought and held her little hands as if he would never let them go. He bent his head, dry-eyed, but with a sob in his throat. Wretchedly clinging to her hands, her poor, wan hands, he strove to speak, but could not.

There was silence for a few moments, moments that throbbed with the rhythmic beat of the encroaching tide of eternity. It was she who broke the stillness, with faint, sweet voice—an echo of their yesterday.

"Micky, dear," she asked, "is it—is it good-by?"

He buried his face in the coverlet, with shaking shoulders; he could not speak.

The slim form stiffened, the little hands clinched upon his own; clinging like those of a baby, frightened in the dark. "Oh!" she moaned, as he looked up, cruelly startled, "Micky! Micky! I can't bear to die! I can't bear to die! Ah, I'm so young—I love life—I love you! Help me to live, dear,—I'm afraid—afraid to die!" Her dear arms were about his neck, clinging in wild fear; she shuddered like a child in the brutal grasp of a black dream; her eyes, dark with terror, sought his own.

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Tortured as he was, he tried to calm her, soothing her with gentle words. "Ah, what can I say, Maisie?" he breathed. "Only this: you're leaving—as white as you came—and you needn't be afraid; there, you needn't be afraid."

After a little she lay quiet, still clasping his hand, while he gently smoothed her brown hair and wiped the tears from her eyes with the gentleness of a woman. For the moment his own grief was overcome; he must comfort her, sustain her through the shadowed Valley.

He spoke to her words of tenderness and courage, words he could not have remembered afterward; for still, to his numbed senses, it was an unreal dream and his strength, to help her weakness, came from without. But as he spoke she grew calm, her eyes grew big and solemn, even as her pallor deepened in the dusk of the little room; and to her, about to set out upon the untried way, was granted the mercy of peace.

"Micky, dear," she murmured, and he had to bend his head low to catch the words, "where dreams come true—you know—we've talked of it—but it won't be here. But somewhere—some day—"

With a low, bitter cry he gathered her close, stammering that he was unfit, that there was another blot, even now; that it was another repetition of the old, wretched story. She understood, and only clasped him the closer with her poor frail arms, only looked into his face with eyes that were wonderful with forgiveness and love. She did not seem startled; indeed, it is probable that she had known instinctively long since that it would always be so, and had determined, with a woman's rare devotion, to help him, notwithstanding, to the end.

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"What did I tell you once, dear?" she whispered. "It's for you to always try, Micky, and what credit's for those who do not have to try? You have tried, Micky, and you must keep on trying—for my sake. Maybe I'll know—maybe I can help you. Remember, dear, you can never fail while you try—and it's trying—it's trying that brings us where—dreams—where dreams—come—true."

The low, broken murmur died in silence, the tired eyelids closed drowsily. To the haggard eyes of the boy, strained in the gloom, it seemed that a gray shadow visibly crept over the cheeks that had been fevered; with sudden anguish he realized that the hot little hand within his own was growing cold. He felt a swift, mad impulse to hurl himself upon this stealthy, invisible Terror that had entered the room,—this curse of the ages, of the world—to throttle it.

He drew a sharp breath, like a sob, convulsively pressing the little hand as if he would draw her back from the opening Gate of Shadows. Then her eyes opened,—and within them was the dazed look of eyes that strive in vain to pierce enshrouding mists.

"Is it night?" The whisper was ghostly faint. "I—I can't see you—any more—"

"It is—it is nearly night," he told her, very gently.

Again the whisper, wan and ghostly, wafted from afar to him who remained helpless behind, for it was the unseen presence that must guide her now.

"I'll go—to sleep, now—till—the—morning."

And with her cold, confiding little hand in his, she closed her eyes like a tired child and fell asleep.

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CHAPTER XXIV

ADRIFT

HARKINS' walk to the office that afternoon was one of abounding satisfaction. Everything pointed to as impressive a climax as he could have wished. Everywhere were knots of excited men, with strident voices and waving fists. The clubs and hotels were teeming with the story, the curbs proclaimed it. Even yet newsboys were reaping harvests and the news stands could hardly supply the hungry demand.

Public opinion, at first stunned by the sensational exposure of a system of wholesale corruption well nigh unbelievable, was gathering force like a mighty, overwhelming wave, which was to sweep down in vengeance upon the trembling, illicit crew, now leaderless. That, however, was not yet known, nor was it destined to become so till the evening. There would be another rich morsel for the Courier in the early morning, though no one knew it now. Shaughnessy had been wont to live in seclusion that was undisturbed save by his summons to one or another of his crew. His lodgings occupied the upper floor of a small, two-story building, with unpretentious stores below, and few ascended the stairs who had not business with Shaughnessy and had been summoned thither. Also, he had invariably taken his meals

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outside, and had so managed in all respects that once in his retreat, while he so willed, he was in unbroken seclusion.

So it transpired that Shaughnessy, limp in the chair before the desk in his den, sat in grisly silence through the long night till the dawn which heralded his exposure; sat through the long day, with the sun's rays beating through the window upon his glazed, unwinking eyes; sat quietly while men throughout the city cursed him for the masterly knave he was, conferred together in plans of futile reprisal. So he sat, deaf, unheeding, beyond it all; while some men watched others whom they thought harbored him, and others thought him gone. And so he was—to a far country, where they could not follow him. Even now, as he sat there waiting for them, there was a sardonic look about his grim, relaxed jaws which might tell them, when they were finally come,—summoned through the veriest accident to get him,—that they were welcome to what was left.

Harkins, during his walk to the office, passed some members of the gang, hurrying by with white faces and furtive eyes. Others affected an exaggerated boldness which failed to hide their uneasiness. The city editor met Colonel Westlake; and the Courier's owner, his face wreathed in smiles, wrung Harkins' hand, prophesying truly of the rout of graft and triumph of reform at the imminent election, resulting from the story, and of the satisfying punishment of criminals in high places that would follow.

"And another thing, Harkins," the Colonel added, gravely, "I know about the man who wrote that story, and of the circumstances under which it was written.

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Under those circumstances, it is nothing less than wonderful. The man who wrote it has a most serious handicap, it's true, but he's to be substantially taken care of; we can't afford to lose him. Why, with that one thing removed, he's a world-beater. I've been talking with them about him at the office. Brice will tell you of my instructions."

Arrived at the office, Harkins met Dick Glenwood for a few moments, the two lighting cigars while they chatted about the story that was making new local history, and about the man who had written it. A small hand satchel rested on Dick's desk. He had received a sudden commission to leave town, in the interest of the Courier, on an errand which would occupy a couple of days.

"About those documents," Harkins was saying, "that O'Byrn and Slade stole from Shaughnessy. Why, they clinch the case in themselves. What a quixotic chance to take! Shaughnessy must have known that if they ever got loose they'd in themselves damn the whole gang, including himself."

"He's always had a streak of the ten-twent'-thirt' about him, with all his shrewdness," returned Dick. "Then he's a suspicious cuss, and he's had a gang around him, in low places and high, that he's had to watch. He's had his eye skinned for treachery every minute, and he may have thought the time might come when he'd have to get away in a hurry and leave a lot of traitors stuck. And a thing like this would do it. Queer card, Shaughnessy, but now he'll get his with the rest."

"You don't suppose he's left town?" inquired Harkins.

"No," Dick replied. "They've been watching. The Fusionists are working on a deal to have the thing done

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in order, but they'll scare him up somewhere and have him safe, even if it takes a day or so. He was out, you know, when we got O'Byrn away from his ranch last night, and must have come back afterward, though I'll bet he didn't stay after he saw the door." He chuckled. "I kicked myself afterward because I didn't leave Slade to watch when he came back, and then follow him, but I forgot it in the rush. And he's safe, anyway."

Safer, indeed, than Glenwood thought.

"By the way," Dick added, "I've got those papers safe. They'll be of use later, and the defendants can't dodge. Poor old Boynton; they tell me he's prostrated, crying like a baby."

"How did that Irish scoundrel ever get his hooks into him?"

"How did he get 'em into a lot of other good people? He knew the weaknesses of men, Harkins, and he played 'em for all he was worth, and he was worth a lot in that business. But I rather guess he's got through for a while."

"You took charge of O'Byrn this morning, after the story," observed Harkins. "Where did you take him, to a hotel?"

"To his lodgings," answered Dick. "Didn't disturb anybody. I found his key and carried him up stairs and put him to bed. Left him sleeping like a dead man. Whew! it was fierce, wasn't it?" He heaved a reminiscent sight.

"Dick, the credit's yours," warmly responded Harkins. "How you did it stumps me. You seemed to have him mesmerized."

"You exaggerate it," replied Dick. "I knew him, that's

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all. Harkins, he's a wonder. He has a memory that I never saw equaled. You saw how it worked last night, and he scarcely knew where he was, but that mind of his was pumping right along like an engine under full head. You saw me put those documents into his hand. He just glanced at them, for he had examined them closely before, of course, and the whole thing came flowing back into his head. The same with the few notes he had. Why, he couldn't have equaled that story, sober. His trance seemed to lead him along strange paths that he never struck before, and his range is wide. Those odd whimsies at unexpected moments—you remember them? They'd have made you howl if you'd had time. He's a wonder. All I did, all I had to do, was to start the machinery."

"Yes, and kept it going," cut in Harkins. He scowled. "What started him batting at such a time?" he demanded.

Glenwood shrugged his shoulders. "It's a disease," he said, briefly. "You and I can't understand; we can only be sorry for him and think how lucky we are. But who else could have beaten the clock at that stage of the game? Be easy on him, Harkins. Drunk or sober, he's a wonder. Besides," as he rose and took his satchel, in readiness to go, "there's a little girl—"

"Oh!" broke in Harkins, explosively, "I sha'n't say a word to him! Poor devil, he'll do thinking enough to keep him straight for a while. I wish it would be for good. A fellow like that— Oh, it's a damned shame! Going, Dick? Well, good luck."

Left to himself, Harkins dived into a mass of telegrams and general inquiries from far and near, already brought in by the story. He was for some time absorbed in the

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work they entailed, then paused for a conference with Brice, the managing editor. He came out, smiling to himself, and resumed his work.

The boys began dropping in to receive their assignments. Everyone was elated, the triumph was a general one. It was a badge of honor that day to be connected with the Courier's staff. Every newspaper man knows the feeling which at such a time affords one of the rare compensations of the grind. On this particular afternoon, warmed with the *esprit de corps* that tempers the winds of journalism to its shorn lambs, they gathered in the great room, enthusiastically discussing the great story and its effects; the sudden aggression of Fusion, the swift dismay of the gang. "The town'll shed Shaughnessyism like a snake skin," declared Kirk, and the rest agreed with him.

Finally most of them had departed on various tasks. Harkins became again immersed in his work. Oblivious to all else for a while, he suddenly became conscious, through strained eyes, that the short fall afternoon had waned. He rose to light the gas.

A figure, which had entered unnoticed, stood beside his desk. Harkins started with surprise, glancing keenly into the man's face, indistinct in gathering shadow. "Why, hello, Micky!" he exclaimed, with a hearty slap upon the other's shoulder.

"Mr. Harkins"—the tone was not like Micky's ordinary one, so listless was it, so like the mechanical drone of the early morning—"may I talk with you a few minutes alone?"

"Sure," said Harkins, and led the way to his private room. They passed two or three of the force, who would

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have stepped forward to greet O'Byrn, but they looked into his eyes, with their strange stare of misery, and stood hesitant.

"Mr. Harkins," pursued Micky, when they were alone, "I leave tonight." His drawn, haggard face, in which the freckles stared grotesquely, was pathetic in its apathy. His voice was strangely dreamy, as if he were talking in sleep.

"Leave tonight!" repeated Harkins, blankly. Then, gathering from the boy's manner that the cruel results of past lapses had inspired him to seek to anticipate expected dismissal, he added heartily: "Why, that's all right, Micky. We won't speak of it. You made good, my boy, and you're solid."

"Thank you," still in the strange voice. "It's more than I could expect. Don't think I'm not appreciative, but I leave tonight."

"Now, see here, my boy," said Harkins, with smiling earnestness, his hand on O'Byrn's shoulder, "listen one minute. That little matter is dead; you killed it yourself by as splendid a piece of work as was ever turned out in a newspaper office. I don't know how you did it but you did, and there's an end on't. Now I had a little talk with Brice this afternoon, in response to a suggestion from Colonel Westlake, who's interested in you, O'Byrn, as he has good reason to be. Now, we agreed that you shall receive a substantial increase in salary, to begin next week. You've earned it, and you stay and continue to earn it. Is it a go?"

Micky faced his chief, his eyes shadowed, his face sombre. "Oh, Mr. Harkins," he said brokenly. "Don't believe for a minute that I don't appreciate this from the

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bottom of my heart, for I do. It ought to mean so much —so much—but, Mr. Harkins, I've just left my little girl —and they're gettin' her ready now—to lay away."

"Why, O'Byrn!" Micky's sore heart acknowledged the unmistakable throb of sympathy in the tone.

"So, Mr. Harkins," he continued, "I must go—I can't stay to see her put away—it would kill me! I got an offer yesterday—it's from a fellow I used to work with. He's gone ahead," with a bitter, wintry smile. "Well, it's a long jump, but I've got just about enough to get there—and I leave tonight. I've got something comin',— you give me an order down stairs for it, will you? Some would call it heathenish—cuttin' out like this—but you understand, don't you? I don't hardly realize it yet— it was only an hour ago; and when I do realize it—" his nails digging in his palms, "I must be moving—and moving swift—or I'll go mad. And I guess I'll always be moving now." In his eyes dawned the old, restless light, the wild will-o'-the-wisp which lures the born wanderer the wide world over, in erratic flight till the set o' sun. His dazed brain, his sick heart craved the old nepenthe of unrest.

Harkins pressed his hand. "I won't say much, my boy," he said. "There's not much to say at times like these. Only this,—and don't take it amiss,—conquer the one thing that has hampered your career and you can get anywhere. Change as often as you like—perhaps it would be better for a time—with that thing obliterated it will invariably mean betterment for you. And remember, wherever you go, whatever your mood, you've got an anchor now." His kindly, earnest eyes held Micky's, who somehow felt better.

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"Tell Dick I was sorry not to see him," he said a few moments later, "and I'll write him. I'll send you my address, in case you should need me on this ring business you just spoke of, though I guess you have evidence enough without. And now, thank you for your kindness from the start, and good-by. I'm a queer sort, Mr. Harkins," his voice quivering, "but I've got to be moving now—moving fast."

"I know," replied Harkins, "and remember this, Micky, if you ever come this way again. Of course, we change in this business—I may be in Kalamazoo by that time—but that story of yours will always be an open sesame for you in this establishment, or, for that matter, into any newspaper office in this town. It's a business of short memories, but once in a while there's an exception, and you scored one today. And now—you know I'm sorry, more sorry than I can say—but be good, Micky, and remember the anchor." He wrung the boy's hand and they parted.

Micky left the great room with shoulders a little squarer, somehow. Descending in the elevator, he found Mead on the ground floor, waiting for it.

"Hello!" called Mead, shaking Micky's head. "Great story! You've won that bet, all right."

"What bet?" returned O'Byrn, listlessly.

"Why, that Santa Claus bet about Shaughnessy," returned the other, producing a ten dollar bill. "You know—that he'd get his. Well, you're a wizard and here you are. It's a little early, but Boynton's grave is waitin'. Don't be bashful, I've more than made the stuff already on outside specials on your story. Thought I'd pay you right up, maybe you could use it."

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